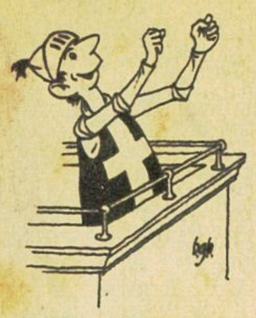

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PRIVATE EYE

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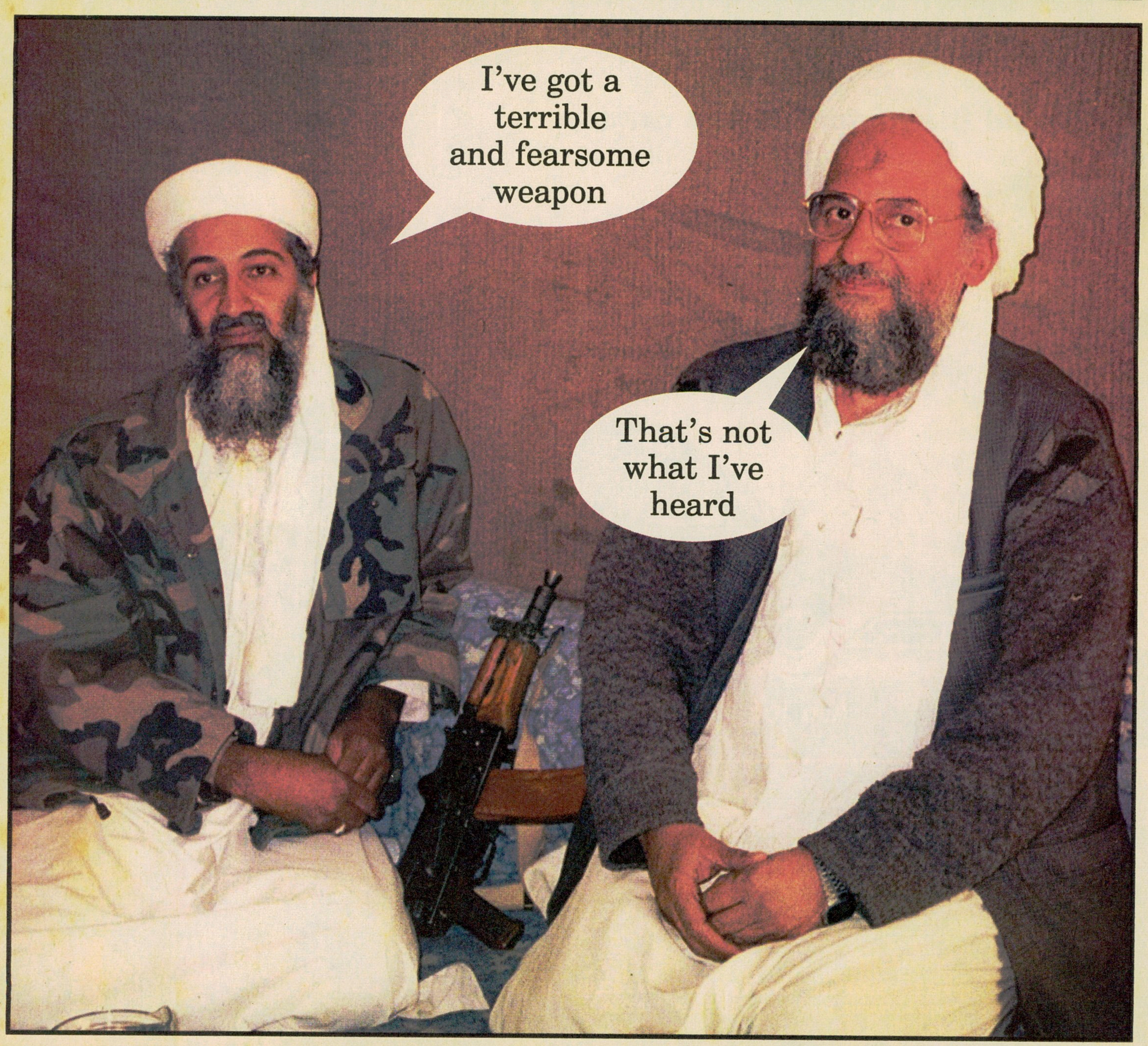

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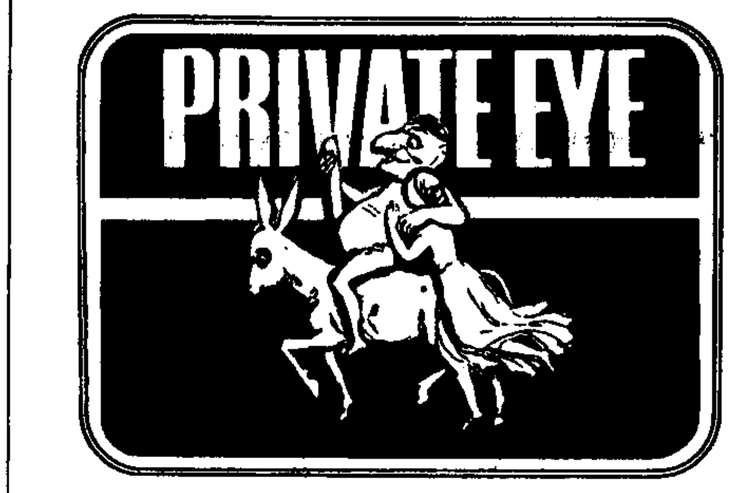

Won in the Eye

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PRIVATE EYE WINS LIBEL ACTION

AFTER an unbelievable nine years of litigation and five solid weeks in the high court, the accountant John Stuart Condliffe abandoned his libel action against *Private Eye* giving the magazine a historic victory over himself and over his solicitors, Peter Carter-Ruck & Partners.

The case became as much about the monstrous nature of the litigation as the accuracy of the original article. The *Eye* was vindicated on all counts and the judge, Mr Justice Gray, called it "the most disproportionate litigation he had ever come across".

Before the trial began, solicitors at Peter Carter-Ruck & Partners told *Private Eye* that their costs to date were more than £600,000. They claimed that their costs for the trial itself would add a further £1.2m and that *Private Eye* would face losing £1.75m if the verdict went against us. They made much of the fact that, as they were acting on a no-win no-fee basis, they would be able to charge up to double their normal huge hourly rate as a success fee. This did not include any damages that their client might receive, and nor did it include *Private Eye*'s own very substantial legal costs.

Condliffe's solicitors told the *Eye* that we would end up paying these bills ourselves anyway since their client would go bankrupt immediately if we won the case. *Private Eye* was therefore placed in a no-win situation financially and risked going bankrupt itself if we chose to fight the case. There was overwhelming pressure to settle and to give in to Peter Carter-Ruck & Partners' demands for vast sums of money.

We chose not to do so. The original story was correct and our witnesses were telling the truth. The decision to fight the case was vindicated as Condliffe and his solicitors could not even agree with each other in court. After five pointless, expensive and unnecessary weeks they were forced to abandon a case that should never have been brought. Peter Carter-Ruck & Partners suffered the ultimate humiliation of having to agree a payment on behalf of their client of £100,000 to *Private Eye*'s legal costs. Without wishing to overstate the case, this was a major triumph for the *Eye*.

DOWNING Street's loss, said Tony Blair on the departure of Anji Hunter, is BP's gain. But Hunter is just the latest high-profile figure to join the jobs swap-shop between Whitehall and the oil giant.

In April BP CEO Sir John Browne became one of the first raft of "new" Labour's "People's Peers" when he joined the company's former chairman and ex-cabinet minister Lord Simon on the government benches in the House of Lords. Their former colleague Bryan Sanderson, ex-BP managing director, chairs the government's catch-all training quango, the Learning and Skills Council.

Meanwhile Charlie Leadbetter, a former consultant to Lord Browne, is working just up the street in the Number 10 policy unit.

When Hunter starts her new job she may spot one familiar face: Jill Rutter, who quit the treasury press office and went to BP in 1997 in protest at the appointment of Charlie Whelan. But Gordon Brown's current head of communications, John Kingman, tops the lot: he has managed to swop sides twice, leaving the treasury for BP while the Tories were still in charge, before rushing back in 1998 after Whelan's undignified departure.

"MCLEISHGATE" provides a glimpse into the complex situation regarding MPs and their constituency offices.

While some Labour MPs believe there should be local 10 Downing Streets – state-owned offices for MPs, to ensure that parliamentary and party business are kept distinct – under the current rules each member comes to their own personal arrangement with the parliamentary fees office.

Transport secretary Stephen Byers enjoys an interesting set-up whereby he rents out rooms in the same building as his constituency office to two local MEPs and a trade union. He declares this income in the register of members' interests as "rental income in respect of office accommodation in Forest Hall, Newcastle"; but as he only claims MP's office costs allowance for the rooms used as his constituency office he is not obliged to mention that he shares the building with the two Labour MEPs, Gordon Adam and Mo O'Toole (ex-wife of health secretary Alan Milburn); nor that taxpayers' money for their rent is paid into a property account for the joint premises.

STING WAS one of the star guests who celebrated Concorde's return to the skies last week. "Concorde is a symbol of British Airways, of air travel and normal life," he told reporters as he stepped off the ozone-depleting aircraft, which uses up to 10 times as much fuel per passenger, and is far noisier, than any other modern aircraft.

This Sting is evidently unrelated to the Sting who has tirelessly campaigned for environmental issues for more than two decades – and the Sting who recently threatened legal action against the ministry of defence if it expanded the number of RAF aircraft flying from the Boscombe Down base near his Wiltshire estate.

HATS off to the *Sun*, which in the face of a post-11 September circulation panning by the newly-sonorous *Mirror* has bounced back with a new branding campaign to prove that it too can do serious journalism.

The posters (spawn of TBWA) are all giant mock-up newspaper hoardings, designed to speak directly to readers' concerns. And what are these, in this time of war? "Footie", "Extra Chilli Sauce", "Getting the Last Night Bus", offer the ads. "We Love It" is the tagline: alas, according to those dwindling ABCs, increasingly we don't.

"... Sleepy, Dopey and Crony"

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NEWS

TONY BLAIR never ceases to emphasise his unqualified admiration for Islam. Not only does he read the Koran, he is also determined to increase the number of faith-based schools, particularly for Muslims, in the state sector.

In reply to critics who doubt that such schools will have a full science curriculum, Dr Nadeem Malik of Imperial College wrote to the *Independent* the other day pointing out that the winner of the 1979 Nobel prize for phsyics, Abdus Salam (1926-1996), "was a devout Muslim from Pakistan".

Indeed he was. But Dr Malik omitted to mention one salient fact. "You will be interested to know," Abdus Salam wrote to an acquaintance in 1982, "that officially I have already been excommunicated from Islam by the orthodox priests."

The mullahs who excommunicated the greatest scientist that the Islamic world has produced are, of course, precisely the kind of people whom Blair now wants to entrust with the minds of children in Britain.

DIRECTORS and shareholders of Associated British Ports made many millions from the privatisation of the ports and the end of the old dock labour scheme in the late 1980s, but their recent plunge into the American market has been a bit of a disaster.

To make up their £80m losses there, according to a recent *Financial Times* supplement, ABP plans to concentrate on "higher value services on dockside" and a "strategy of maximising profits" in the ports. This explains the current ugly confrontation on the Humber between the company and the 137 pilots who steer some of the world's biggest ships through the country's most dangerous and busiest waterway.

The pilots are well paid: a factor that worries ABP so much that it has declared war on the pilots' co-operative. The pilots were invited six months ago to reapply for their own jobs, and they all refused. When they asked a trade union to organise a strike ballot for them, the freedom-loving ABP went to court to ban the ballot. This attempt failed and the vote went ahead. The vote was 130 votes to 0 for a strike, but Mr Justice Hunt has declared the strike illegal because the pilots are self-employed. The company is recruiting staff to replace the pilots and training them on two coasters that are both so small they don't need a pilot on the Humber.

Angry pilots are intrigued by the role of harbourmaster Paul Hames who is recruiting and training new staff at rates up to 20 percent less than the current pilots are paid. Seasoned seamen on the Humber remember the days when Hames was chairman of the UK Pilots Association and heroically resisted all attacks on pilots' pay and conditions.

THE real reason the memoir of "fourth man" spy Anthony Blunt causes such panic among senior officials at Buckingham Palace is that it reveals how one Queen fought valiantly to save the job of another – one guilty of treason, moreover.

Blunt's account, locked in a vault in the British Library, tells how Brenda fought to save the treacherous art historian's job as keeper of the Queen's pictures when he was unmasked in 1964. This was against the advice of prime minister Harold Wilson and her senior advisers. It also tells how Brenda stayed in regular contact with Blunt *after* he was publicly disgraced in 1979.

When Blunt's treachery was discovered in 1964 it was assumed the queeny old art historian would resign his royal role and concentrate on his academic work. Brenda, however, would have none of it. Thus Blunt retained his elevated position, his friendship with the Queen and the Queen Mother and took Prince Charles under his wing at Trinity College, Cambridge.

When news of Blunt's treason became public in 1979 he resigned instantly from Brenda's staff. He was officially cut off from the palace and his knighthood was annulled, though Brenda prevaricated about doing so until talked into it by her then private secretary, William Heseltine.

Blunt's allies in the palace privately kept open a channel of communication. He received occasional notes from the Queen, exchanged Christmas cards with her and secretly met her on at least one occasion. That the memoir will stay secret until 2013, by which time Brenda, if still alive, would be nearly 90, suits the palace just fine.

Street Of Shame

THE *Eye*'s claim that Abdullah bin Laden was not, as credulous *Sunday Mirror* hacks believed, the son of the world's most wanted terrorist (*Eye* 1040), has been confirmed by the man himself.

"One British newspaper has published an imaginary interview with an Islamabad dateline with one of my sons who lives in Saudi Arabia. All this is false," said Osama bin Laden in his interview with Pakistani journalist Hamid Mir, a transcript of which was carried in every newspaper last Sunday.

Every newspaper? All except one: the *Sunday Mirror*, which three weeks earlier had carried the "World Exclusive" in question, chose instead to carry a written-through version of the interview's edited highlights and, strangely, omitted the quote about his son entirely.

IN another super soaraway exclusive, the Sun revealed last week that the bishop of Oxford had performed an exorcism on the pitch at Oxford United FC "to lift a gipsy curse".

Club chaplain the Rev Michael Chantry, who asked the bishop to do the ceremony, told the paper: "There is nothing to lose by having an exorcism and it's better to be safe than sorry. I am not saying all gipsies have malicious intentions, but it was best to bring in someone to lift the curse. The bishop sprinkled holy water on the pitch and said a prayer of exorcism and blessed the new stadium."

The last four words are true. But, alas, they were the only fragment of truth in the entire story. As Chantry points out, the stadium is licensed for weddings and funerals "so it seemed appropriate to have a traditional blessing at the stadium... It was certainly not an exorcism."

TV's Charles Moore, editor of the *Daily Telegraph*, is a devout royalist and friend of his namesake Prince Charles. He was therefore understandably furious when a national newspaper illustrated a feature on modish London artists with a picture of the prince clutching his erect penis – and even more apoplectic when he belatedly noticed that the publication in question was his own *Telegraph* magazine.

An internal inquiry revealed that the porno pic had been smuggled into the magazine by a designer who was leaving, as a "farewell gift". Unable to punish the miscreant (who had already gone), Moore looked for someone else to blame – only to find that the other two obvious culprits were himself and magazine editor Emma Soames, who had clearly not bothered to check the page-proofs before publication.

Rather than sack himself – or the immensely grand Soames – Moore declared that the matter was now closed.

THIRSTY *Spectator* hack Bruce "Brute" Anderson is on the wine committee of the Travellers' Club. Yet despite this expertise he hasn't yet mastered the art of writing cheques to wine merchants.

At the end of August, preparing for a shooting jaunt as the guest of Tory MP David Heathcoat-Amory, the Brute ordered three cases of claret from El Vino's to be sent to his host's Scottish estate near Pitlochry. The wine was dispatched forthwith, and Amory was suitably grateful for Anderson's kindly gesture.

Because of El Vino's close links with the *Spec* (where it is a regular advertiser), the company assumed that its columnists could be trusted. But two months later, despite numerous reminders, it has been unable to obtain payment from the burly pundit.

Chairman Christopher Mitchell has now sent a desperate plea to the magazine. "I am extremely reluctant to take out a summons for the £388 he owes, because of his relationship with yourselves. Can you think of any way we might be able to obtain payment for these goods?"

Those who recall Anderson's long history of appalling behaviour can supply the answer: er, probably not.

THE imminent demise of *Sunday Business* revives that perennial question: how much longer will the Barclay twins put up with the clod-hopping incompetence of their chief box wallah Andrew "Brillo Pad" Neill?

Brillo's first great triumph as a publisher was persuading the Barclays to buy Cap'n Bob's *European* – which he then relaunched, at vast expense, as an anti-European rag. By the time it folded, the twins were estimated to have lost £60m on the venture.

Then came Neill's brainwave of relaunching the *Scotsman* – a highbrow, pro-devolution newspaper – as a downmarket rag railing against Scottish self-government, thus alienating almost all its natural readership. This cost the Barclays £5m and precipitated a mass exodus of hacks to rival publications. At another of Brillo's papers, *Scotland on Sunday*, circulation has plummeted from 114,000 to 93,000 since last year.

And so to *Sunday Business* – which has lost almost a third of its readers (and all its best hacks) since Brillo had the bright idea of doubling the cover-price to £1 and slashing the marketing budget. Although the circulation is officially over 50,000, many of those are practically given away. As one business commentator noted recently, the full-price sale is actually 23,000 – "about the same as the *Hartlepool Mail*". Latest figures show that the paper lost £8m last year, bringing the accumulated losses of *Sunday Business* under Brillo's stewardship to an estimated £30m.

Meanwhile Brillo is particularly busy elsewhere as a cheerleader for the war effort, denouncing doubters such as Alex Salmond and Charles Kennedy "whose experience of fighting is limited to the playgrounds of their youth". (Alas, details of Neill's own military career are curiously absent from his potted biography on the scotsman.com website.) He also complains that "Radio 5 Live's morning and late-night talk shows are so dominated by anti-American, anti-war hard left drivel that it should rename itself Radio Taliban". No doubt this animus is wholly unrelated to Brillo's own abrupt departure last year from hosting the Sunday breakfast show on, er, Radio 5 Live.

KEITH Waterhouse, resident sage at the *Daily Mail*, cocked up when suggesting that President Bush's phrase "Those that aren't with us are against us", repeated by Tony Blair and chief whip Hilary Armstrong, must now be destined for the Dictionary of Quotations.

As any fule kno, it is already there: "He that is not with me is against me; and he that gathereth not with me scattereth abroad." It is attributed not to Dubya Bush but to one J. Christ in the Gospel according to St Matthew, chapter 12, verse 30.

IN HIS new book *How to Lose Friends and Alienate People*, Toby Young expresses puzzlement at his inability to get or keep girlfriends, despite the fact that his father is a peer. At one point he even visits a "dating therapist" in New York in the hope of understanding "my problems with the opposite sex".

Really, however, there's no great mystery. Toby has what New Yorkers would call an attitude problem – perfectly exemplified by a message he sent 20 years ago, while doing his A-levels, to wee Harry Phibbs, the right-wing *wunderkind*.

"Dear Mr Phibbs," Toby wrote in the letter, which has somehow come into Lord Gnome's possession, "I read about your antics in this week's *Private Eye* and must say I was very amused. Not only is sexism fun but some feminists enjoy it... Recently I started up a political discussion group called 'The Young Apostles', and we hold regular meetings where topics such as disarmament, feminism, culture, education, the media, the constitution and international finance are discussed. I originally banned females from taking part, partly because I don't believe them equipped with the ability to discuss things, and partly because I don't know any bright females. Much to my horror some local saggy-titted feminists (Greenham Gremlins) found out about this discussion group and its high membership standards, and picketed the first meeting.

"Naturally they weren't prepared to listen to my arguments about the genetic character traits of women... They claimed they were just as intelligent as any 'men' so I offered to administer IQ tests from the book *Know Your Own IQ*. They wouldn't even comply with this reasonable request so I was forced to enlist the services of the local constabulary in order to disperse them.

"Anyway, to get to the point. I was wondering whether you (and perhaps one or two of your brighter friends) would be interested in attending any of these meetings. I can promise that no members of the (un)fair sex will berate you on your way in... Yours sincerely, Honourable Toby D. M. Young."

Two decades on, Young reveals in the latest *Spectator* that his favourite pastime is slavering over porn films on satellite TV – which remind him of "the hours I'd spent as an adolescent, trading copies of *Mayfair* and *Men Only* with my friends". At last we know what actually happened at those high-minded meetings of Toby's "Young Apostles".

"Toby Young? So you're the Toby Young you write so much about"

WHILE newspapers seem to love extolling the virtues of such sexy but sinister-looking pieces of military hardware as the B2 bomber and the unmanned "Predator" aircraft, both of which seem to have flown out of science fiction and make great graphics spreads, they aren't always so popular with the armed forces.

Take the B2 "stealth" bomber. US air force secretary James G. Roche is so unimpressed he has refused to order any more of them. This is particulary surprising since Roche is a former executive of Northrop Grumman, the firm that builds the $2bn aircraft. As he told the *Washington Post*: "If we buy 40 more B2s, I don't think we will add one more drop of sweat to any enemy."

The US air force bought just 21 of these planes, having originally planned to buy several hundred. The B2's "stealth" capability is of course irrelevant in Afghanistan, where the Taliban have no serious air defences; and the stealth comes at fantastic cost. As Roche points out, the plane cannot fly at supersonic speed, can only fly at night and needs special "climate controlled" hangars as it suffers in cold weather. The B2 can also only fit a relatively small payload in its low profile shape. A big old B52 deploys a lot more bangs for a lot less bucks.

The unmanned "Predator" – sometimes armed with suitably scary-sounding "hellfire" missiles – also draws admiring comments from journalists and politicians, but as a leaked report from the American defence department's director of operational test and evaluation showed, the $20m drone is less effective than advertised.

According to Thomas Christie's report, "the system's limitations have a substantial negative impact on the Predator's ability to conduct its missions". Moreover, "poor target location accuracy, ineffective communications, and limits imposed by relatively benign weather, *including rain*, negatively impact missions such as strike support, combat search and rescue, area search, and continuous coverage".

The Project on Government Oversight, the US watchdog that released the report, claims that since 1995 an estimated 17 of the 50 Predator aircraft built for the US air force have crashed during tests and another five are believed to have been shot down on military missions. The Serbs, Iraqis and now the Taliban have all downed a Predator.

Even the official military testing department "finds the system to be not operationally suitable... because of the serious deficiencies in reliability, maintainability and human factors design.". However, the Predator does fulfil one function: it gives newspapers a hook on which to hang stirring war reporting and run those fancy graphics.

● THE AC-130 gunship, a converted Hercules, does not drop the BLU-82 bomb as incorrectly claimed in the last issue. Its cousin, the MC-130, another converted Hercules, does. The arrival in Afghanistan of the Hercules gunship heralded the arrival soon afterwards of the Hercules bomber. American forces began using the MC-130 to drop BLU-82 "Daisy Cutters" on Saturday 3 November.

JUST FANCY THAT!

"The foot-and-mouth crisis claimed an unusual casualty yesterday: the latest West End musical from hit composer Andrew Lloyd Webber. *The Beautiful Game*, a collaboration with Ben Elton, the comic-turned-lyricist about a 1960s Northern Irish football team, was the latest casualty of a 10 percent slump in takings in the West End as overseas visitors stayed away because of the disease.

"A spokeswoman for the composer's company, the Really Useful Group, said the show has lost just under £1m in advance bookings from America due to the foot-and-mouth tourism slump."

— From the *Independent*, 11 July 2001.

"Lord Lloyd Webber, composer of some of the world's best-known musicals, including *Cats, Phantom of the Opera* and *Evita*, is particularly annoyed with the gloom and doom merchants. 'All this is overdone,' says Lloyd Webber. 'All that's happening is that struggling shows are closing that would close anyway. It is a great, convenient excuse. If you go to the hit shows, they are not half full. It is some of the older musicals and unsuccessful musicals where there are problems."

— From the *Sunday Telegraph*, 11 October 2001, referring to the slump in West End theatre since 11 September.

Warballs

"The tragic events of 11 September provided a sombre backdrop for many speakers and delegates to the recent CIPD [Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development] conference... Yet despite this, none of the gurus on show took the opportunity to draw on one of the deeper lessons to emerge from the tragedy.

"Schooled in management theory and economics, Bin Laden has taken into account all the key principles of high performance working. Al-Qaeda is a flat, non-hierarchical organisation comprising dozens of highly trained semi-autonomous teams. The global network revolves around its shared mission, vision and values...

"Bin Laden has, of course, adopted this model to pursue the objective of mass murder rather than mass customisation. But the sad irony is that Al-Qaeda seems more attuned that many UK firms to high performance practice... If terrorist leaders can appreciate the need for high performance working, those at the top of decent law-abiding organisations ought to as well."

— John Philpott (chief economist, CIPD), *Personnel Today*

"This was one of those events in which almost everyone had a thirst for breaking news and information... A WAP-enabled phone was a great way to access all the latest news. On the train I was able to share some of the news with my fellow travellers, who were impressed that I was reading live news from my phone screen. When I eventually got home, the pictures on the TV were incredible, but with the aid of my WAP phone I already had the background details. Although totally devastating, the tragedy in the US has probably opened a lot of eyes to the value of mobile data communications... The WAP experience was smooth, solid and easy for the majority of users."

— Ray Anderson, chief exec of WAP company Bango, *New Media Age's Wireless Business*

"Despite the economic uncertainty around the world after the terrorist atrocities in America there is good news for businesses in Richmond. The Richmond Chamber of Commerce has united three business organisations to form Richmond in Business at its office at Richmond Adult Community College in Parkshot."

— *Richmond Informer*

"*Special Report: Women & Money.* Among the survivors of those who died in the 11 September terrorist attacks on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon, perhaps the most affected are the widows and children of the victims. These people must deal not only with the grief of losing a husband and father, but also, in many cases, with the financial consequences.

"What financial planning lessons might all of us learn from the experience of these families? As part of our ongoing series called Women and Money, *BusinessWeek Online* offers practical advice that every family can use on how to plan for the unthinkable. Even if you're fully prepared, it's information worth checking out."

— Circular from *BusinessWeek Online*

"IMMEDIATE MEDIA ALERT. The international release of the 2001 Durex Global Sex Survey has been postponed following recent events in the USA until Tuesday 27 November to mark World AIDS Day."

— Press release from Durex

Condliffe Abandons Case – Carter-Fuck Humiliated

THE LIBEL ACTION brought against *Private Eye* by West Country accountant John Stuart Condliffe ended suddenly and dramatically in its sixth week when on Tuesday 6 November Mr Condliffe withdrew his claim and agreed to pay £100,000 towards the *Eye*'s costs.

Mr Condliffe was suing the *Eye* over an article published in March 1992 which alleged that Mr Condliffe dishonestly overcharged clients of his firm, Condliffe Hilton. On the morning of the final day, Mr Justice Gray, the judge presiding over the action, made known his view of the stage the trial had reached just four days into Mr Condliffe's evidence. "Everyone agrees that the credibility of Mr Condliffe lies at the heart of this action," he said. "I regard the questions raised in the course of the cross-examination of Mr Condliffe on Friday 2 November to bear directly on the crucial question of his credibility… I consider that each of these questions is not collateral to the issues that I have to decide but rather of direct significance in the context of this litigation." He said that those questions cast "very considerable doubt on his credibility".

The Client Files

THE questions raised concerned the way in which thousands of documents relating to the 15 former clients of Mr Condliffe named in the case had been supplied to the *Eye's* solicitors, Davenport Lyons, by his solicitors, Peter Carter-Ruck & Partners. On the first day of Mr Condliffe's cross-examination, Thursday 1 November, the *Eye's* counsel Ron Thwaites QC asked Mr Condliffe why he had failed to deliver the files he kept on individual clients to his solicitors in the form in which they were maintained at his firm's offices.

Upon disclosure to the *Eye's* solicitors, all the documents had been removed from the client files and rearranged in chronological order so that papers relating to 15 different clients were jumbled up. Davenport Lyons had to spend a vast amount of time recompiling bundles relating to each client. Mr Condliffe told Mr Thwaites that, on the contrary, he had delivered his client files to Peter Carter-Ruck & Partners in their original condition.

Thwaites: *Do you know why someone has taken out all the documents in your client files and resorted them in a bundle ten foot high to my instructing solicitors?*

Condliffe: *It's a problem to me.*

Thwaites: *So if they were destroyed and put into chronological order that was all done without your knowledge and approval?*

Condliffe: *I certainly would not agree to anything like that.*

Thwaites: *In defence of what I suggest is the indefensible action of splitting up these files, your solicitor has written to my solicitor to say that they didn't get the files from you in the original condition. Is that right? Is what your solicitor says true or untrue?*

Condliffe: *My position is that the files were delivered intact.*

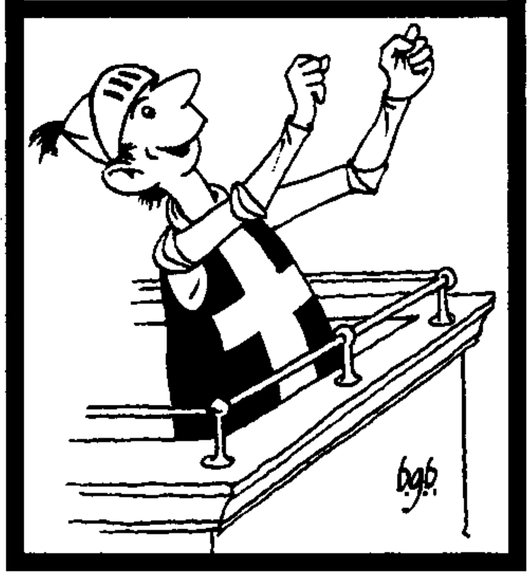
Thwaites: *Your solicitors are clearly saying that they got from you a mass of unfiled documents.*

Condliffe: *That's not the case.*

Thwaites: *You're confident about that are you?*

Condliffe: *Totally confident.*

EYE IN THE COURTS



The following morning, Friday 2 November, Mr Condliffe's counsel Geoffrey Shaw QC told the judge that he had investigated the conflicting statements of Mr Condliffe's solicitors, Peter Carter-Ruck & Partners, who said that the client files had not been delivered in their original condition and Mr Condliffe himself who said that he had delivered them in their original form. "My client adheres to that answer and my instructing solicitors adhere to their letter," said Mr Shaw. Mr Thwaites clarified the position.

Thwaites: *Mr Condliffe, the position we have reached therefore is, as appeared on the face of the documents yesterday, there was a conflict between you and your solicitors as to who is telling the truth.*

Condliffe: *That is correct.*

Thwaites: *Is it the case that your solicitors' statements are untrue?*

Condliffe: *That is correct.*

Thwaites: *Your solicitors are telling lies about you?*

Condliffe: *I'm telling the truth.*

Thwaites: *Well it must follow that your solicitors were lying in what they were writing to* Private Eye.

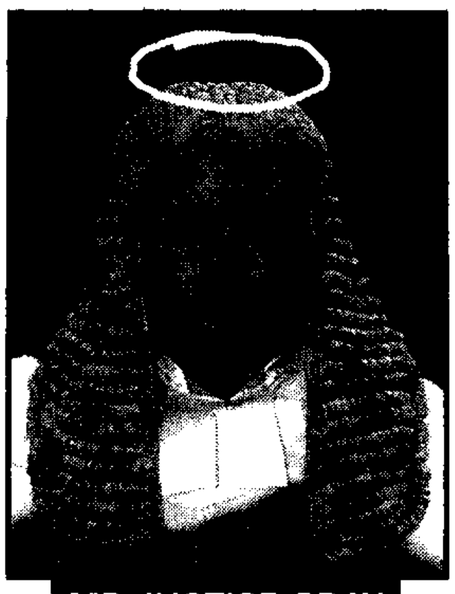
Condliffe: *Yes.*

Mr Thwaites then turned to the issue of how the bundles of documents were prepared ahead of the trial. He said that *Private Eye*'s solicitors, Davenport Lyons, had offered to prepare these, an offer formally upheld by a ruling of Mr Justice Morland in July of this year. Davenport Lyons duly prepared 28 bundles relating to each of 15 of Mr Condliffe's former clients and delivered copies of these to Peter Carter-Ruck & Partners by the end of July. At this stage, however, Mr Condliffe and his solicitors decided that what they had been supplied with was inadequate, and created a new set of 113 bundles. Mr Thwaites asked Mr Condliffe why the new bundles contained "every conceivable piece of paper in your possession" including blank cheque books. He asked: "Why on earth did you do that other than to confuse, bamboozle and obfuscate?" He suggested that it was: "In order to justify hundreds of hours of excessive work, thousands of pounds of excessive charges." Mr Condliffe replied that it was necessary for the court to see the primary records from which he and his staff had worked.

Thwaites: *So the effect was that these 113 bundles were not supplied until late September and not in their entirety until well after the trial had started. A single set of papers was supplied to my instructing solicitors and the exercise of having them professionally copied took time. There was so little time that we didn't have the court documents before the start of the trial.*

Mr Justice Gray: *At some stage one's going to have to get to the bottom of this.*

Thwaites: *This was a cynical attempt by you to deny us and our expert a proper opportunity of reading papers, evaluating them and dealing effectively with them to expose you as the fraudsman you are. Far from being a man of good character, you are unscrupulous and cunning.*



MR JUSTICE GRAY

Condliffe: *That's not true, those documents were there all the time.*

Thwaites: *When we penetrate through the layers of documents we can see how little there was to do by a conscientious, honest, competent accountant not trying to enrich himself at the expense of little people… Many of the documents were not easily identifiable My Lord, this is an abuse of process of the court.*

Justice Gray: *You see these are impossible for the defendants' solicitors but you say it was nothing to do with you?*

Condliffe: *Absolutely right.*

Thwaites: *To inflate the costs to try and frighten off* Private Eye, *who as I've said are not Times Newpapers, that was not part of the attempt to burden us in this way was it?*

Condliffe: *I've said before, the files I delivered were intact.*

Thwaites: *If you didn't, it means your solicitors were conspiring behind your back to inflate the costs of your action without reference to you.*

Mr Justice Gray put it to Mr Condliffe that if he had been aware of what was going on: "Your reaction would have been what had happened was ludicrous"? Mr Condliffe agreed and replied that he had expressed his concerns about the state of his client files to his solicitors. This was never clarified.

Manual Time Ledgers

MR THWAITES turned next to the question of when Mr Condliffe had supplied manual time ledgers, the documents from which his clients' bills were originally calculated, to his solicitors. The manual time ledgers were drawn up from daily time sheets filled in by staff at Condliffe Hilton and from the diaries of the two partners, Mr Condliffe and Mr Hilton. In cases where clients queried their bills a further document, a typed time summary, was prepared to justify the charge, and it was these typed time summaries rather than the manual time ledgers that were originally disclosed to *Private Eye's* solicitors. It was only in 1999 that Davenport Lyons realised these manual time ledgers existed and asked to be provided with copies. They did not receive all of the available documentation (some of the manual time ledgers had been mislaid) until 15 October this year, two weeks into the trial.

Thwaites: *I'd like to know from you why you didn't supply all the manual time summaries for each client at the time you instructed your solicitor?*

Condliffe: *1993?*

Thwaites: *Or 1994, or 1996, or 1998, because I'm dealing with correspondence in 1999 when solicitors for* Private Eye *identified what they saw as another underlying source of information. Why didn't you give your solicitors your folder containing these sheets?*

Condliffe: *When I was asked to provide this information I did.*

Mr Thwaites asked Mr Condliffe whether he had ever told his solicitors these manuscript time ledgers were "generally disposed of" in the course of business. In a letter to the *Eye's* solicitors in 1999, Peter Carter-Ruck & Partners had claimed the manual time ledgers could not be supplied as they were routinely destroyed by Condliffe Hilton. In complete contradiction of this claim Mr Condliffe replied that a manual time ledger was "not the sort of document we would envisage throwing away".

On Monday 5 November Mr Shaw asked for a long adjournment to speak to his client, after which he read out a statement to the court on behalf of Mr Condliffe. This said, among other things, that the phrase "generally disposed of" had been used by Peter Carter-Ruck & Partners on Mr Condliffe's express instructions and that contrary to Mr Condliffe's previous assertion that he had supplied all the manual time ledgers in his possession to his solicitors before August 1999, the ledgers had still not been delivered on 14 December 1999. "That particular statement perhaps begs more questions than it answers," said Mr Justice Gray. Mr Shaw also told the court that his instructing solicitors were "considering their own position" in the light of Mr Condliffe's evidence and that a senior partner at Peter Carter-Ruck & Partners, Alisdair Pepper, had been brought in to oversee the proceedings.

Mr Thwaites pressed Mr Condliffe on what precisely his firm's policy was regarding the storage of manual time ledgers. Mr Condliffe replied that the understanding of his staff was that once a typed time summary had been produced, the manual time ledger could be thrown away. "Well that's diametrically opposite to what you said on Friday afternoon," said Mr Justice Gray. Mr Thwaites then referred Mr Condliffe to the typed time summary he had produced for Mr and Mrs Gordon when they queried his bill – he said the manuscript time ledger had not been found. The typed summary referred to 1¼ hours of Mr Condliffe's time spent reviewing and discussing the lease for Mr Gordon's upholstery workshop. Mr Thwaites said that Mr Gordon disputed this time had been spent and suggested it was more likely he would have consulted a lawyer than an accountant about the lease. "I'm not a lawyer," agreed Mr Condliffe. "No," replied Mr Thwaites, "you're not a lawyer, you're a liar".

Cornish Judgement

THE foreshortened cross-examination of Mr Condliffe by Mr Thwaites did not focus purely on the documents in the case. On the first day of his cross-examination Mr Thwaites asked Mr Condliffe if he had been involved in any other legal cases recently. Mr Condliffe said that although he had acted in several cases for clients he could not think what Mr Thwaites was leading to.

Thwaites: *Is there any reason today why people in Cornwall who know you might believe you to be a dishonest man?*
Condliffe: *Tell me.*
Thwaites: *No I'm asking you.*
Condliffe: *I cannot think so.*

Mr Thwaites went on to ask Mr Condliffe about a case which took place at the high court in Truro in January this year. One of his clients, businessman Dick Rogers, was resisting a claim by Lloyds Bank to repossess his mansion worth almost £2m. Mr Condliffe appeared in the witness box in support of Mr Rogers's claim. Mr Thwaites read out to the court the ruling of the presiding judge in that case, Judge Tyzak, who said: "I found Mr Condliffe a curiously defensive and unreliable witness. On several occasions when he was being courteously cross-examined by Mr Chapman, he simply would not give a straight answer. On one occasion Mr Chapman tried over and over again to obtain a straightforward answer to a straightforward question but Mr Condliffe simply would not and in fact did not answer it. I do not accept his version, neither do I accept what Mr Rogers said about this."

Thwaites: *You were there and gave support to the story of a man who was described by the judge as a total liar what does that make you?*
Condliffe: *I do not believe he was a liar.*
Thwaites: *I've shown you this morning a document that casts you in a very unfavourable light do you agree with that?*
Condliffe: *Yes.*
Thwaites: *You're a man who claims to have a good reputation and to be of a high moral character. That document damages your character doesn't it? That ruling of a judge in Cornwall where you've lived for twenty years.*
Condliffe: *I suppose to some extent it must do.*

Dishonest Witnesses?

ALSO on the first day of his cross-examination Mr Thwaites asked Mr Condliffe about the evidence given in the witness box by his former clients in the third week of this libel action.

Thwaites: *Is it your case that all your former clients are dishonest?*
Condliffe: *No it isn't.*
Thwaites: *How many of them do you say are dishonest?*
Condliffe: *I think I've heard some of them not speak the truth.*
Thwaites: *Isn't deliberately not speaking the truth a definition of dishonesty? Which weren't telling the truth?"*

Mr Condliffe said that of his former clients he believed that Mr and Mrs Gordon, Ms McGill, Mrs Arkell, Mr Stevens, Mrs Hatcher and Mr Collins had not been telling the truth. He said that he could not remember the evidence of Peter Balkwill who was also a witness, and that Jill Elson, a former friend of the Condliffes, had not been lying.

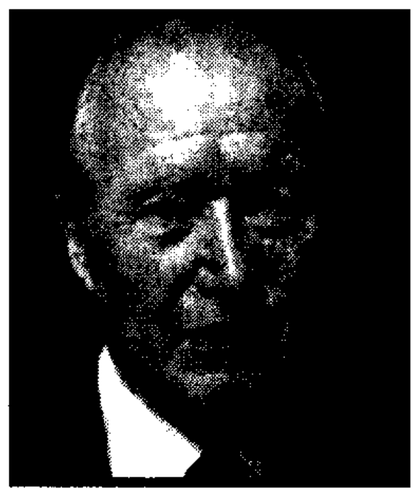
Thwaites: *It's your case that seven out of the eight former clients who came here are dishonest people, told lies.*
Condliffe: *I do not agree with any of them.*
Thwaites: *Does that mean they're lying?*
Condliffe: *Yes.*
Thwaites: *This is a case where there's no room for mistakes, so by the end of it one side or the other will have done a lot of hard lying?*
Condliffe: *Some evidence must be wrong, I agree.*

On three consecutive days Geoffrey Shaw QC, Mr Condliffe's counsel, requested adjournments to allow both him and his instructing solicitors Peter Carter-Ruck & Partners to "consider their position" and to speak to their client. At 2.45pm on Tuesday 6 November, Mr Thwaites, on behalf of *Private Eye,* came back into the courtroom to tell Mr Justice Gray that Mr Condliffe had agreed to drop the action and to pay £100,000 to the defendants' solicitors within three months.

The case is well and truly over.

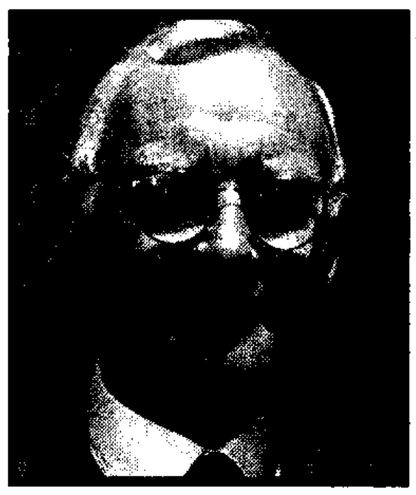
THE LOSERS' GALLERY

JOHN STUART CONDLIFFE: "A liar not a lawyer." The West Country accountant who far from proving he did not dishonestly overcharge his clients, accused his own lawyers of lying and has been forced to pay £100,000 to *Private Eye.* According to the *Western Morning News,* he is now considering whether or not to sue Peter Carter-Ruck & Partners.



PETER CARTER-FUCK: Arch-enemy of the *Eye* and the eponymous head of Peter Carter-Ruck & Partners at the time they took on Condliffe's doomed libel action which included a claim for aggravated damages for the *Eye*'s failure to check the truth of their story with him. He has now parted company with the firm to which he gave his name and has been put out to grass at the provincial firm of Pellys in Bishop's Stortford.

ALISDAIR "IN-THE-RED" PEPPER: Smug senior partner at Peter Carter-Fuck & Partners who was brought in to save the day when Condliffe from the witness box accused his lawyers of lying . Once told the *Eye's* lawyers he would buy a Ferrari with his fees from this case. Now they've told him he'll be lucky to get a Dinky toy. The conditional fee agreement scheme (no win, no fee) he pioneered at the firm hasn't paid off for them in this case.



GEOFFREY "COCK" SHAW: The QC who also took on Condliffe's case on a no win, no fee basis is now owed precisely. . . no money. In 1989 Shaw acted for Sonia Sutcliffe, the judicially-separated wife of the Yorkshire Ripper, who sued the *Eye* over the allegation that she had sold her story to the *Daily Mail* for £250,000. She won the case, but her damages of £600,000 were reduced to £60,000 on appeal. When Shaw represented her in a later case against the *News of the World,* it transpired that she had accepted at least part of £25,000 as a gift from a *Mail on Sunday* journalist and Shaw's opposite number George Carman QC said in his closing speech: "Sometimes clients put lawyers in embarrassing positions."

WHEN Scotland's first minister Henry McLeish finally resigned on 8 November – he had received the prime minister's blessing only that week – the move was lauded by a lot of twaddle from the Scottish political establishment: "He has behaved honourably"; "this was a muddle not a fiddle"; "McLeish has dedicated himself to public life for nearly three decades"; etc, etc.

In fact McLeish had been sub-letting office space without disclosing the information to the Commons fees office since 1987. In April this year, when the parliamentary standards commissioner Elizabeth Filkin began her investigation, McLeish claimed his failure to declare his extra income was "a simple error, made in complete ignorance, and once it had been started, it carried on".

In October it was revealed that McLeish had paid back £9,000 of the £36,122 of public money he had received in office expenses. But recently on *Question Time*, the normally nimble McLeish told David Dimbleby he had "no idea" how much money was involved. The Filkin inquiry came to an end in the summer when McLeish ceased to be a Westminster MP and was elected first minister after Donald Dewar's death.

McLeish's sub-let Glenrothes office has played host to five tenants since 1987, including solicitors Digby Brown, a firm described by the BBC as "having close links to the Scottish Labour Party". Digby Brown is believed to have paid in the region of £1,000 a quarter for the use of McLeish's office. The office was obviously so important to the firm it never got around to installing a fax or phone.

On closer examination Digby Jones appears to enjoy an almost umbilical connection to the Scottish Labour establishment. When pisspoor Scottish Labour party press officer Neil Gillam left his job, he went to work as a solicitor for Digby Brown.

Before becoming a press officer for Labour, Gillam had been employed as a special adviser at the Scottish Executive, where he was a close colleague of Brian Fitzpatrick, now the MSP for Strathkelvin & Bearsden. Before his political career took off, Mr Fitzpatrick worked as a solicitor for Digby Brown.

The same Brian Fitzpatrick denied claims in 1999 that he was influencing the appointment of sheriffs. One of his appointments was one Peter Gillam, father of Neil Gillam and – hey presto! – a partner in a solicitors' firm by the name of Digby Brown!

The Scottish Executive, in a bid to change the white, male image of judges recently appointed the first ever female sheriff, Rajni Swanney. Ms Swanney began her legal career working for Digby Brown. Her husband Robert also happens to be a senior partner in a firm of solicitors by the name of, er, Digby Brown.

Down in Westminster, beavering away as a junior minister for e-commerce, is "Wee Dougie" Alexander MP. "Wee Dougie" is a protégé of the brooding chancellor Gordon Brown, for whom he once worked part time when he wasn't working as an associate for… Digby Brown.

JACK-PUDDING CLOWN, BUFFOON
JACK-STRAW WORTHLESS MAN

RSC programme note, Stratford

ANJIE Hunter, Tony Blair's old school friend and senior aide for the past seven years, has stepped through the revolving doors and left Downing Street for a senior position at BP.

Hunter – who could be relied upon to schmooze anyone from Bill Morris to Rupert Murdoch for her boss – fell victim to pre-election skirmishing between party fixers [Baroness] Sally Morgan and former general secretary Margaret McDonagh. She threatened to leave but was persuaded to stay with the promise of a hefty pay increase – purloined from the Labour party after McDonagh was obliged, against her will, to sign over a cheque of some £50,000.

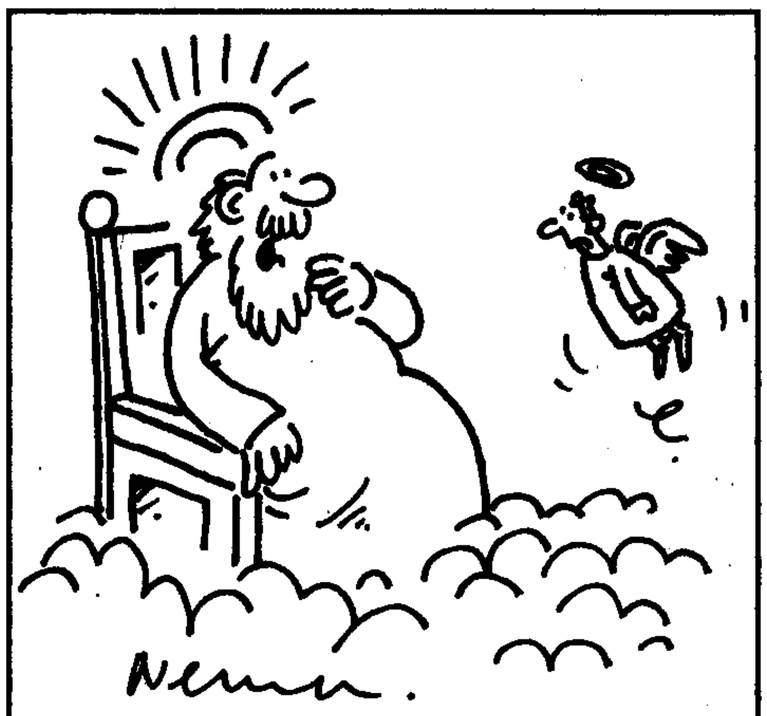
With Labour now in dire financial straits, some Millbank party staff wonder whether Ms Hunter could now perhaps afford to pay some of that money back.

THE pre-election haemorrhage of staff from 10 Downing Street shows little sign of abating.

Key advisers John Cruddas and Faz Hakim were among the first to depart, while the abrasive Alastair Campbell was assigned to a less visible role behind the scenes. Then Sally Morgan left for the Lords and Anjie Hunter (see above) has recently left for the corporate world.

Still, the Dear Leader can at least console himself that he can still call on the services of his, and Mandy Mandelson's, close friend Roger Liddle. "Piddle" is a key policy adviser on European issues in Downing Street, and shortly after the 1997 general election was netted, along with Derek Draper, by investigative journalist Greg Palast in the infamous "Lobbygate" affair.

Palast was subsequently turned over by the *Mirror* in very dubious circumstances, after the girlfriend of another Blair aide complained that he had harassed her in a conference hotel room. Liddle, on the other hand, stayed and prospered. Such is his loyalty to Blair (and his hatred of Gordon Brown) that at the last party conference he was overheard canvassing friends for a "walk-out" during the chancellor's speech.



"How can Tony Blair be everywhere?"

AMID the furore over Scottish first minister Henry McLeish's resignation, another "Officegate" affair has slipped by almost unnoticed.

It has emerged that Ulster Unionist Roy Beggs has been claiming parliamentary rent allowance for his constituency office and paying it to, er, himself. The MP for East Antrim was co-owner of the premises, along with his wife Wilma, between 1989 and 1998. They then gifted the building to their daughters, who now receive the rent from the taxpayer.

The facts were uncovered by parliamentary standards commissioner Elizabeth Filkin, who concluded that Beggs had "increased his family's income at public expense". Filkin discovered that it wasn't actually against the rules for MPs to receive rent allowance for property owned by themselves or relatives. But Beggs also over-claimed, and has now repaid £2,454 to the Commons fees office.

Happily, he will not be out of pocket. Over the first 11 years, a total of £25,054 rent allowance was paid to him and his wife, and more recently his daughters. And the office, which cost just £10,000 to buy in 1989, had jumped in value to £28,000 by the time his grateful daughters became owners in 1998.

WORRIED residents under the Heathrow flight path can rest assured that MPs will give their fullest consideration to the issue of whether to go ahead with the building of Terminal 5.

Most MPs are very familiar with Heathrow, as for the past quarter of a century the British Airports Authority (BAA) has given them free parking passes for the airport. Until recently it was not considered necessary to declare these in the register of members' interests because they were given to all MPs indiscriminately. Now, however, the electoral commission has tightened up the rules, forcing every MP to register the receipt of a pass and to declare its value as £5,245.20.

MPs are unhappy about this figure which represents the full potential use of the free parking space rather than the actual number of times they park at the airport, and many have returned the passes rather than have a gift rated at more than £5,000 from BAA against their name. Nonetheless 165 MPs have chosen to hold on to the goodies collectively worth nearly £900,000. Any Terminal 5 protester considering taking their opposition to the European parliament, meanwhile, should bear in mind that 49 MEPs also accept free car parking worth an estimated £192,761 from BAA.

"NEW" Labour's love affair with the transport lobby is blossoming again and the results may soon be visible in Britain's motorway service stations.

Compass, the catering and hotels group that demerged from Granada, wants to squeeze more cash from its 33 motorway service stations and rebrand them under the new "Moto" label. The company is even considering a massive scheme to sell the properties and then lease them back, raising a handy £1bn. But to make the plan work Compass must raise turnover at the service stations, which is why it is asking the department of transport's Highways Agency to relax the rules that say service stations cannot be "destinations" in their own right.

At present motorway service stations are only allowed to offer goods useful to travellers. These rules are designed to stop congestion. Allowing them to sell other goods, which would slowly turn them into out-of-town shopping centres, DIY superstores and the like, might generate more cash for companies like Compass, but it would also pull more traffic on to already overloaded motorways.

However, Compass knows how to invest wisely: indeed, it is now funding the Labour party itself. At the last party conference the official reception of the department of transport, addressed by transport secretary Stephen Byers himself, was sponsored by Moto.

Changing policy on what motorway service areas can and cannot do would be a complete U-turn for Labour. Back in 1998 Larry Whitty announced strengthened guidelines to "ensure that motorway service areas continue to serve the genuine needs of motorists and do not become destinations in their own right".

This April transport minister Keith Hill told parliament that a service area should not "incorporate significant shopping and leisure facilities, which will quickly transform it from somewhere for motorists to take a necessary break into an out-of-town retail or leisure development". However, now that Moto is paying for Labour meetings entitled "Delivering on transport, local government and the regions", perhaps normal rules no longer apply.

BLACKWATCH

Peer Review

"THE newspaper industry in London has long attracted proprietors of immense ego," Conrad Black once observed, reviewing a biography of Lord Beaverbrook. And he should know. The newest member of the House of Lords has been described by one Canadian author as "a man who rejoices in the intellectual and financial status of not giving a damn, of living in a kind of Basil Fawlty wet dream in which Basil has not only won the football pools but has also swallowed a thesaurus and somehow acquired another 50 points of IQ."

While still in his 40s he wrote a bombastic 522-page autobiography; two years later, he was the subject of a sympathetic 468-page book by the financial journalist Richard Siklos. Not bad going for a man who, until the mid-1980s, had scarcely been heard of outside his native Canada.

For many years he has brooded on the title he would adopt when offered a peerage. Lord Ravelston and Lord Havenwold were early contenders; in the event, however, he has chosen Lord Black of Crossharbour, a reference to a station on the Docklands Light Railway two stops from his *Telegraph* HQ at Canary Wharf. ("The first peer to name himself after a tube station," one fellow-Canadian commented unkindly.)

He would have been in the Upper House long ago if his beloved Margaret Thatcher hadn't been driven from office too soon to reward his devotion. "John Major, I don't call upon him in the same way," he told his biographer in 1995. "While our relations are perfectly cordial there's not the same or even slightly comparable rapport that there was with her. I had considerable admiration for her and she knew that. And she was much more comfortable with people in my – if I may put it this way – socio-economic echelon…"

Conrad Black and "friends"

To get a picture of his "echelon", one need look no further than the Hammer-horror cast assembled by this tireless social climber and power-groupie for the international advisory board of his holding company, Hollinger: Lord Hanson, Lord Rothschild, Lord Carrington, Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, Richard Perle, Paul Volcker, Giovanni Agnelli and, of course, Baroness Thatcher. In the summer of 1990 his wife Shirley considered changing her name to Catherine. "Oh no," Conrad replied. "That's too common." She became Joanna instead, but even that wasn't enough to save the marriage.

In 1992 he acquired a new wife to match his new status, in the mini-skirted form of Barbara Amiel, a reactionary glamour-puss who confessed that she found powerful men "sexy". She too became a director of Hollinger and acquired a column in her husband's *Daily Telegraph*. "Barbara Amiel will speak her brilliant mind," the paper boasted on her arrival; no doubt flunkeys of the Emperor Caligula said something similar about his horse.

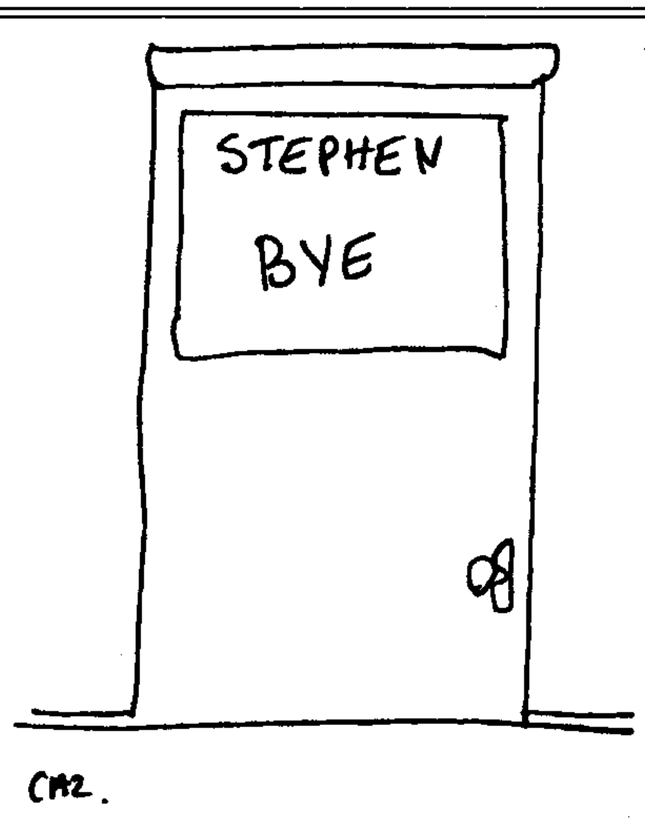
As Black likes to point out, two previous Canadian squillionaires have come to Fleet Street and won a seat in the Lords. If his admirers are to be believed, he is Lord Thomson and Lord Beaverbrook rolled into one – a brilliant businessman and a serious student of politics and history, who can pursue both propaganda and profits with equal panache. But there has been little evidence of his management genius in recent years. His once-mighty empire of 400 newspapers around the world has shrunk to the *Telegraphs*, the *Spectator* and a handful of other publications. The latest results from his company Hollinger International reveal a $15.5m loss for the three months to June 2001, compared with a $26.8m profit for the same period last year. Although the *Daily Telegraph*'s circulation remains over a million, half of those are sold at a big discount or given away.

What of his political nous? As one might expect of someone whose mentors are Henry Kissinger and Margaret Thatcher, he sees only the world as it is reflected in the polished mahogany of boardroom tables. In October 1991, shortly after buying the *Spectator*, he fired off an angry letter protesting at the magazine's "unbalanced" coverage of George Bush senior. "In recent years," he added, "the *Spectator* has published an error-riddled cover piece on the Reichmanns and Canary Wharf and a gratuitous sketch of Lord Carrington. Lord Carrington and Paul Reichmann would have the right to expect to be treated fairly by the *Spectator* even if they were not directors of the companies that ultimately owned it and friends of its proprietor."

Alas! A year later, after Bush had lost to Bill Clinton and Canary Wharf's troubles had forced the Reichmanns' main company into bankruptcy, Black took up his pen once more. "Subsequent events demonstrate that Stephen Robinson was not mistaken in taking the Democratic quest for presidency seriously and Edward Whitley, the author of the Canary Wharf piece, was essentially correct… I would like to retract those aspects of my letter."

This is pretty rich coming from a newspaper proprietor who is forever berating reporters for their slipshod methods. ("My experience with journalists," he testified to a Canadian Senate Committee, "authorises me to record that a very large number of them are ignorant, lazy, opinionated, intellectually dishonest and inadequately supervised.") As the episode shows, his own sense of reality is no more reliable than that of the drunkest Lunchtime O'Booze in the Street of Shame.

But he owns newspapers. And, after many years of sucking up to the right people, he is now a member of parliament. His installation ceremony caused vast amusement in Canada. "Thank you for the lovely picture of Conrad Black in his Halloween costume," said a letter in the *Vancouver Sun* last week. "It was also very clever of him to get people to dress up as Henry Kissinger and Margaret Thatcher… I would probably have chosen other people for my 'pretend friends', but each to his own." Even prime minister Jean Chretien joked that Conrad had given up his Canadian citizenship purely so that he could be photographed in "a women's dress and a wig".



Letter from **Dhaka**

from Our Own Correspondent

HERE in Bangladesh, the world's third largest Muslim country, we can point with pride to a democracy that in these difficult times can serve as a shining beacon to our Islamic brothers in more barbarian parts.

As a sign of how progressive we can be, in our just completed elections the two candidates for the presidency were not chaps with beards, but a pair of colourful women. After a feisty campaign, Khaleda Zia, with her swingin' sixties hairstyle, defeated Sheikh Hasina, daughter of Sheikh Mujib, the founding president of Bangladesh, leading her four-party coalition to a thumping victory with more than two thirds of the seats in parliament.

Our leading ladies are sworn enemies but actually have rather a lot in common. Both only came to lead their parties because more important male relatives were assassinated. Sheikh Mujib was killed in 1975 in a military coup. Khaleda Zia's husband, Ziaur Rahman, suffered the same fate in 1981. And both live in a fantasy world marked by the imagined evil machinations of their rivals.

Khaleda Zia says she has proof that Sheikh Hasina wants to kill her. She told her sycophantic supporters that one of Ms Hasina's bodyguards had been offered more than £500,000 in return for carrying out the task. Not to be outdone Sheikh Hasina accused her rival of being a terrorist and suggesting that she wasn't sufficiently athletic upstairs to run our country of some 130 million people.

While it is well known that our opposition leader is a bitter woman – convinced that the elections were rigged on a massive scale even though a host of foreign and international observers decreed otherwise – she may have a point about the brain power of the new PM, who is so "grass-roots" she speaks no English. There's a competition among diplomats here to see who can hold the longest one-to-one conversation with her. The record is one and a half minutes.

But with the overwhelming victory of Khaleda Zia at the elections, it is likely that such poison may start to recede. That's because in a show of dedication to our democracy, Sheikh Hasina has announced that she will boycott parliament. It is a policy that has become something of a tradition here, employed by both women over the last 10 years whenever they've been out of power. When in office they denounce such boycotts as bad for our country's international image. When in opposition they say they have no alternative.

But the diminution of bipartisan insults may also be due to the fact that our PM now has other things to worry about, such as affairs of state. Our foreign exchange reserves are perilously low, unemployment is rising because of the downturn in the world economy and there's been a marked deterioration in law and order.

We will soon be deciding on the sensitive question of whether or not to export our vast supplies of natural gas to India. It looks as if we will, because leading international oil companies have been offering all sort of bribes – sorry, "incentives" – even though it would be far more cost efficient for us to keep the gas and build power stations for our own energy starved country. Indeed, we are confident that we will soon be able to add corruption to flooding and poverty as one of Bangladesh's principal claims to fame. It's everywhere. A bribe can buy you anything from a top exam result to the dropping of serious criminal charges.

The new prime minister insists she is ready to declare war on such pernicious behaviour. She recently sent a senior minister abroad to reassure foreign donors corruption in particular will no longer be tolerated. The briefing she received after the visit probably wasn't too comprehensive, though: the minister's bags were stolen at the airport.

TV

Friday Night With Jonathan Ross (BBC1)
So Graham Norton (C4)

THE Friday night schedules currently feature the greatest clash between rival varieties of camp since Butlins and Pontins went head to head in the holiday market. No sooner has Graham Norton signed a big new contract with Channel 4 to present his late-night Friday series than he finds Jonathan Ross coming up behind him and desperate to get in his slot, as it would doubtless be put in the argot of both these shows.

Ross isn't, in fact, gay but he takes on the camp manner which schedulers have deemed appropriate to this particular TV evening. Rather as the editorial columns are currently taking the line that we are all Americans since 11 September, television seems to have made a policy decision that we are all gay on Friday nights from about 10.30pm. Unimpressionable heterosexuals are left to make do with *Newsnight*.

So Graham Norton continues much as it started. Last Friday, the host opened with his now traditional appeal for the studio audience to volunteer confessions. Had anyone out there ever "been over-seen in an unusual situation". Of the two exhibitionists selected, one was a woman who "while having my usual five o'clock dump" at work had accidentally pulled the alarm in the disabled loo. Everyone had burst into the cubicle and seen her. In fact, you suspect they'd have yelled "are you okay in there?" first but that would have spoiled a bad story. Then there was a bloke who, as an adolescent, had been discovered wanking in the store-room of his parents' sweet-shop.

In the section of the show always devoted to sexual websites, Norton this week discovered a device which supposedly allows American women to practise their blow-jobs. His two special guests – author Jackie Collins and *Big Brother 2* winner Brian Dowling – were not so much interviewed as subjected to torrential innuendo. Dowling, a former Ryanair steward, was prompted to tell a gruesome story about a passenger who, when Dowling offended her, exposed her genitals. She was, inevitably, menstruating at the time, making the anecdote an unusually explicit version of the show's characteristic squeamishness about female sexuality.

Though hosted by a man less likely to blanch at the thought of

a tampon, **Friday Night With Jonathan Ross** has been sent in by BBC1 with the dream of stealing Norton's audience and so the tone here as well is very much a boys' night up. Ross's resident band is called Four Poofs And A Piano, which is, you might say, so Graham Norton. Celebrity guest Sir Elton John was questioned almost exclusively on whether or not he shaves his testicles, a courtesy in the gay world apparently. Sir Elton replied that he used cream. Ross countered that he liked to keep a bit of fuzz on the balls. "But does your wife not object to the pubic hair in the teeth job?", queried Sir Elton. It is a peculiarity of these series that any Martian tuning in would assume that all human sexual activity consisted of fellatio.

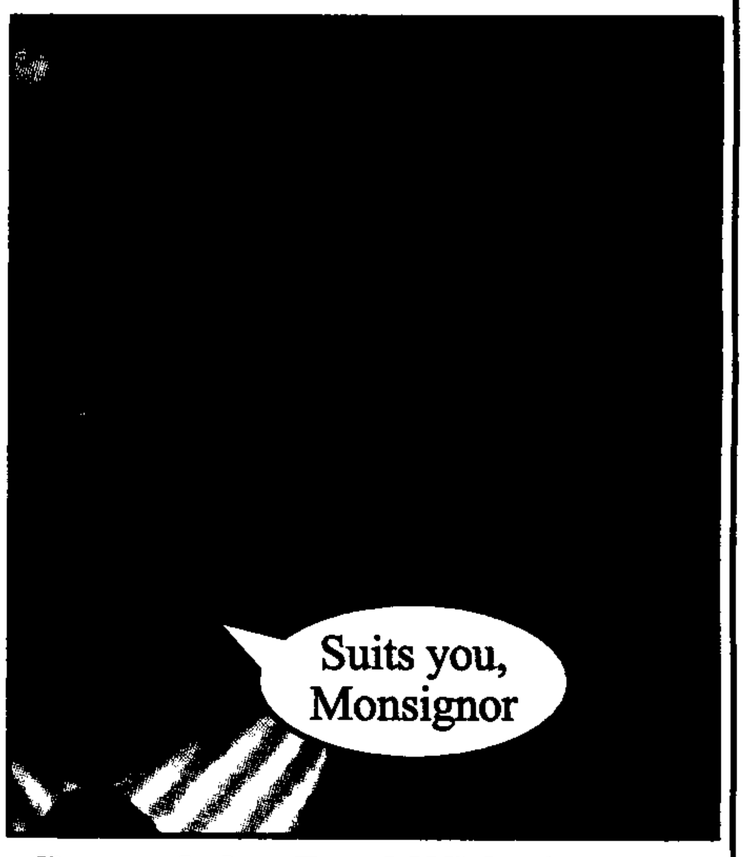
Uselessly one-dimensional in their interviews, both shows begin with an intro monologue of topical gags borrowed from Letterman and Leno via Johhny Carson. Those American examples, though, famously employ dozens of writers each of whom has perhaps one in 20 of their gags accepted. With the British versions, you have the sense of a couple of guys with typewriters delivering their first drafts.

Norton's would-be witty soliloquy, for example, tends to rely on juvenile gynophobia. Two separate newspaper stories about Liz Hurley – one that she is pregnant and the other that she has a "large part" in a new movie – are linked by the observation that the "baby should come out quite easily". Large part, you see. Ross's monologue is less sexual but equally desperate. A newspaper report of four public schoolboys being expelled for making ecstasy tabs in the lab prompts the comment that "they can't be the first students to get an E in chemistry". Anyone writing either of those jokes for Letterman or Leno would soon be on Skid Row.

In the end, the battle honours, small and ragged as they are, go to the Norton camp, if only because his series does something with the Letterman format which America itself would never attempt: an openly and dedicatedly gay talk-show on mainstream TV. Ross can be original – there's been nothing else quite like his Saturday morning show on Radio 2 — but, on television, his obsession with Letterman always leaves him seeming second-hand. In this new fake-gay series, it's even worse. He's fourth-hand, not merely trying to be Letterman but trying to be Norton being Letterman. It's not what he's good at. Someone should put him straight.

'Square Eyes'

SPLIT personalities
Bob Moore



Pope John Paul Whitehouse

MEDIA NEWS

WHITE City researchers and broadcast assistants can breathe a sigh of relief now that the Beeb's anthrax precautions are up and running.

Now, all post is opened by specially trained security staff. But when the initial first line of defence was set up, with orders that all post would have to be opened in a single room, researchers and BAs were rostered to pop down there, open everybody's post and bring it safely to the desks of powder-shy producers everywhere.

DUMB BRITAIN

Steve Allen Show, LBC

Steve Allen: What does the Celtic name Conan mean?

Contestant: Barbarian.

Steve Wright in the Afternoon, BBC Radio 2

Steve Wright: Who played the lead character in the 1961 movie El Cid?

Contestant: Charles Hawtrey.

The Weakest Link, BBC1/2

Anne Robinson: So, Jemma, for £9,350, which is the largest and most heavily populated island in the Mediterranean sea?

Contestant: Spain.

Robinson: Which fortnightly satirical publication published its 1000th issue in 2000?

Contestant: Punch.

SHAFTED
THE SHOW THAT'S GREED DRIVEN...
FOR PEOPLE WITH SUCH A DESPERATE STRIVING FOR CASH...
THEY'RE PREPARED TO HOST DERIVATIVE RUBBISH LIKE THIS
"You are the weakest link, Kilroy-Silk – Goodbye"

★ The Little Book of Dumb Britain. Now on sale – £1.99 ★

FOLLOWING publication of his recent *Guardian* Media piece, John Kampfner finds himself the toast of White City. The article, headlined "The callow youths on our screens have had their day" (5 November) alleged that "intelligent, mediated journalism", presented by the experienced "old guard" was now back in fashion.

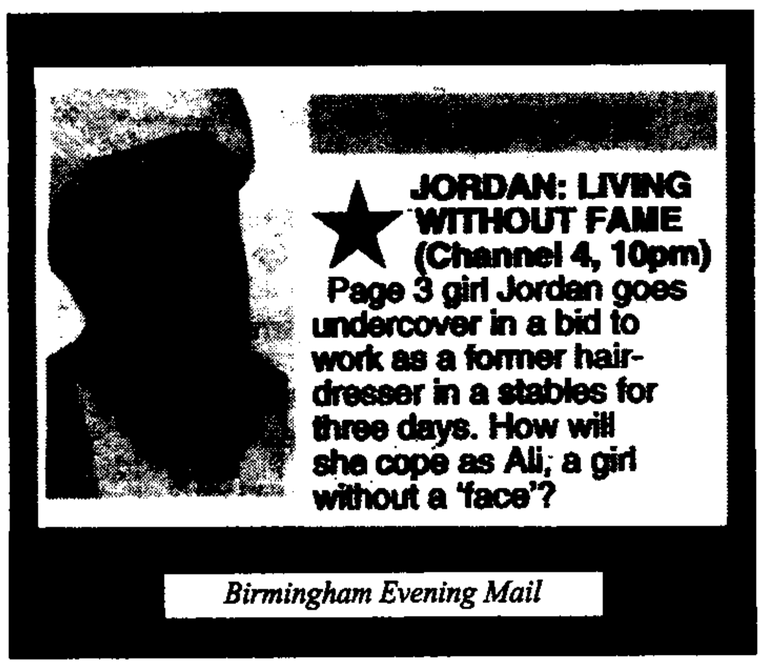
This went down well with the experienced old guard but Kampfner was not just sounding off with no backing. His sources who dared to say that 11 September was "potentially the salvation of British television… viewers want people who actually know their subject", were all extremely senior newsmen in the BBC who have increasingly found themselves at odds with yoof-friendly Jane Root, controller BBC2, and Lorraine Heggessey, controller BBC1, who have both been tireless in their pursuit of young newcomers.

THE Food Standards Agency (FSA) is in trouble again, this time thanks to its inability to give a straight answer on television to a straight question about the risks of eating oily fish.

When FSA contaminants expert Nigel Harrison was interviewed by Julian Pettifer for the BBC TV programme *Warnings from the Wild: The Price of Salmon* back in January, the doctor either could not or would not answer the question: what advice would the FSA give about the risk of eating more than the recommended intake of one portion per week of oily fish?

As Harrison floundered FSA press officer Bron Madson butted in to prompt. The ploy failed, so Bron terminated the interview. The FSA and Madson immediately reported the programme to the broadcasting standards commission (BSC), yelling blue murder about the way they had been treated. The commission's findings, published last week, must have come as a blow to FSA self-esteem, however: every single FSA/Madson allegation was rejected.

Scottish Quality Salmon, the fish farmers' representative body, complained to the BBC that the programme lacked objectivity and did not give them a fair hearing. In October, however, judges at the British Environmental Media Awards disagreed. *Warnings from the Wild* won the award for Best TV Documentary and the judges were "very impressed with the flair and even-handedness Jeremy Bristow [the producer] achieved, and the balance he gave to both sides of the story".

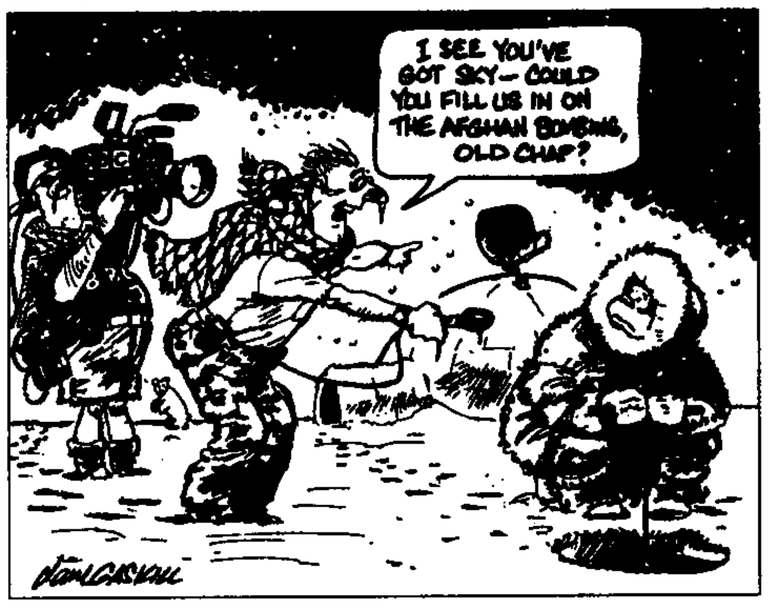

JORDAN: LIVING WITHOUT FAME (Channel 4, 10pm)
Page 3 girl Jordan goes undercover in a bid to work as a former hair-dresser in a stables for three days. How will she cope as Ali, a girl without a 'face'?

Birmingham Evening Mail

NICKY Campbell's sudden desire after 18 months to go public with his suggestion that Radio Two had asked him to take over the Jimmy Young "prog" owes its timing entirely to the fact that Campbell's own Five Live contract was nearing its end.

Competition from Radio Two, he mused, could mean a wallet-busting rise from the Five Live boys. But no such luck. An equally well-timed leak from director-general Greg Dyke's office, revealing that the D-G himself was "furious" and offended by Campbell's "disloyalty", means the smart money is now firmly on the greedy hack getting bugger all.

Plugged In



The Sun

Nominated by Ed Cropley

An occasional column devoted to cross-media plugs masquerading as news.

NEW BIRTSPEAK

LORD BIRT is clearly making his presence felt at Number Ten where he is in charge of the prime minister's absurd "delivery unit". He has even been advertising for helpers in the *Economist*. But only those fluent in Birtspeak need apply.

"We are looking to appoint a number of Associates, who will work on a call-off basis alongside our permanent staff and with stakeholder departments on the end-to-end process of delivery, specifically: planning for delivery; helping to resolve problems as they emerge; monitoring progress; and transferring best practice."

What kind of management drone is Birt hoping to attract? "We are looking for skills and experience in areas such as: public sector reform; hands-on service delivery; leadership and motivation; working in partnership across organisations/sectors; and project management and business planning." *(That's enough Birtspeak. Ed.)*

GOING LIVE

ITV's pisspoor ten o'clock "bulletin" on 4 November went live to an ITN reporter to learn the latest on the Birmingham car bomb.

And where was the reporter to be found? A mere 100 miles away from the scene standing outside a darkened New Scotland Yard.

AD NAUSEAM

WITH impeccable timing, last week saw the launch of the government's new ad campaign to persuade a sceptical public to get online. Impeccable, because the new push came in the same week figures were released proving what everyone not being paid to say otherwise has known for months: the brave new e-world, online toothbrush delivery and all, was an ill-founded pipe dream for schoolboy businessmen.

The latest 40-second TV spot features Stephen Fry, Liz Smith and several other less expensive actors holding forth on the merits of the government's UK Online initiative as their faces morph seamlessly together. All very clever and not cheap either – mark that down as another £3m spooned from the public purse.

Danielle McDonald, in charge of the account at agency D'Arcy, was helpful enough to elucidate: "This is a visually striking commercial and delivers a simple message in a way that is inclusive to the whole population." Not inclusive enough, it seems: only two days later Oftel reported that UK month-on-month internet use had fallen for the first time ever.

The main turn-off, according to a recent Gallup poll, is the speed of dial-up connection, a stumbling block that could be easily removed by the introduction of broadband technology. Alas, just as the doom-and-gloom Oftel figures made the ad splash look a bit silly, up stepped the government's e-envoy Andrew Pinder to make UK Online look even sillier. Pinder's speech to the CBI annual conference suggested that the main obstacle to the quicker introduction of broadband was none other than the mutterings of arch e-sceptic Gordon Brown. What Tony giveth, Gordon taketh away.

USUALLY the shenanigans of agency/client relationships are not worthy of mention, by virtue of being profoundly dull. Readers may be interested, however, to learn of the ludicrous carry-on that has surrounded the newborn Transport for London's attempts to sort out its £9m worth of advertising.

The coveted account (coveted because it allows for some mayoral gladhanding) was awarded first to kings of crony M&C Saatchi without a pitch, after several agencies had been told they'd made a pitch shortlist that turned out not to exist. This led to some entertaining handbags between various agency chairmen in The Ivy. Curiously, M&C was then unappointed and another pitch is now taking place… though M&C has been assured it will retain part of the account, pitch be damned.

If the palaver surrounding appointing an ad agency (at taxpayers' expense) is indicative of future business acumen, don't wait for that bus.

SUPERMODELS

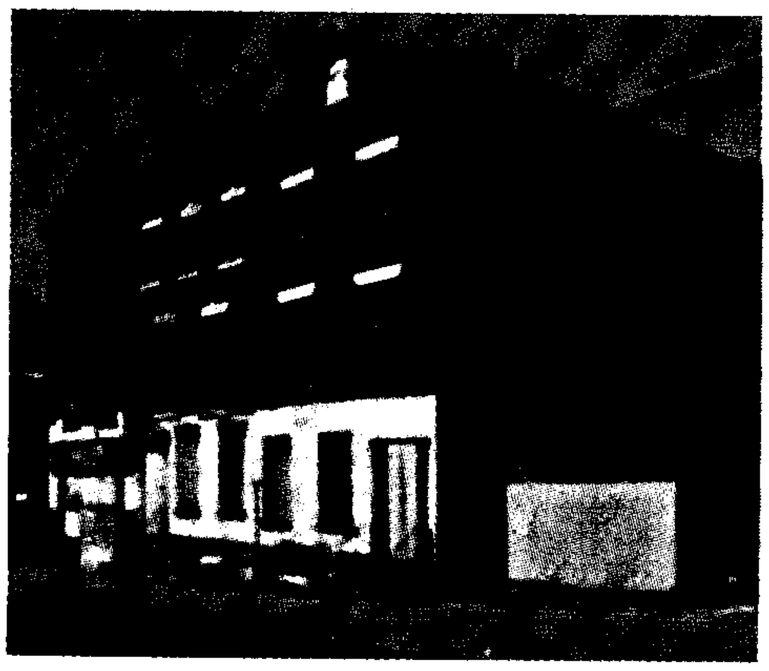
KERBER

NOOKS and CORNERS

STILL peeved at having been beaten by Glasgow in becoming Britain's city of architecture and design in 1999, Liverpool hopes to emulate Glasgow's 1990 achievement and become European City of Culture in 2008. Given its magnificent churches, public buildings and dock structures, perhaps the city ought to be celebrated for its architecture. But its council seems more keen on demolishing historic buildings than any other city in Britain (even Glasgow).

Most of the victims are ordinary Georgian houses which — if in Islington or Edinburgh — would be lovingly renovated and inhabited: the sort of buildings whose preservation is essential if a city is to be more than a collection of listed monuments surrounded by shopping centres.

Liverpool is, or was, a great Georgian city, and the latest Georgian Group newsletter cites an



alarming number that have disappeared this year alone. My picture shows a group of merchants' houses in Duke Street of c.1765: listed grade II* in 1985 and now gone. Whole terraces have disappeared in Toxteth, like 2-12 Berkeley Street — houses near the stupendous Anglican Cathedral which, if Liverpool had had the slightest interest in civilization, would have become a university quarter decades ago. As it is, Liverpool city council -- which is usually the owner of these buildings — evidently couldn't care less. And listing doesn't help much as the council is disinclined to exercise its statutory powers to keep things standing.

As the Georgian Group concludes: "No other city can have lost so many listed buildings in so short a time during the last decade and through a method — dangerous structure notices — outside the usual controls... the present situation is a scandal."

Nor is it just 18th century buildings which are going. The Casartelli Building in Hanover Street was a particularly fine early 19th century block with a handsome rounded corner. Its listing was upped to grade II* earlier this year, but in vain: a dangerous structure notice got it down over the summer. English Heritage offered a grant to save the building, but neither the owner-developer nor the city council could be bothered to respond. And let it not be forgotten that the Albert Dock — now the home of the Merseyside Maritime Museum, Tate North and a successful commercial development — would also have perished if Michael Heseltine, as secretary of state for the environment, had not overruled the brutish city council in the days of Derek Hatton.

As for the city council today, all it cares about are new commercial developments. Of course, it may well be taking its cue from Downing Street as we now have the most philistine government since that of Harold Macmillan — an administration which is dominated by the imaginative reach of the treasury (17.5 percent VAT on repairs to listed buildings) and by the aspirations of ennobled High Tec architects.

In addressing the conference of the Confederation of British Industry last week, President Blair promised to speed up the planning system - which means he wants to dismantle the listed building and other planning controls that so annoy architects and their clients.

Blair citied the eight-year public inquiry over Terminal 5 at Heathrow as a case "where major decisions in the interests of the country are delayed"; but perhaps the planning system here is doing its stuff and protecting our real interests. Do we need to accommodate yet more polluting, noisy, wasteful and often pointless air travel by enlarging the already monstrous Heathrow Airport?

The collapse of the airlines since 11 September suggests we don't, and that perhaps there is no serious case for building Terminal 5 after all. But there are huge commercial interests behind airport development and, besides, the ostensible architect for the further expansion of Heathrow is, of course, Tony's friend My Lord Rogers of Riverside — and he must get what he wants.

IN THE last issue I mentioned the arrogant proposal by Adrian Noble, director of the Royal Shakespeare Company, to replace Elisabeth Scott's Shakespeare Memorial Theatre at Stratford-upon-Avon. I am now delighted to learn that his predecessor Terry Hands, whose protégé he is, has resigned over the plan to demolish all of this remarkable building.

I am also interested to learn that back in 1966 the Arts Team of RHWL architects reported to the RSC that the desired new theatre could perfectly well be incorporated within the space occupied by the present mutilated and unsatisfactory auditorium while retaining the existing excellent foyers and the staircase. But this was not what Adrian Noble wished to hear, so he looked elsewhere. In consequence, he now has a fight on his hands.

'Piloti'

I-SPY

Sydney

Submitted by Martin Farr. £10 paid for similar submissions. *(SAE required for return of photographs. No transparencies.)*

MUSIC & MUSICIANS

WHEN Faber launches its new book on conductor Simon Rattle this week there will be a broad cross-section of the great and good in British music at the party. But with notable exceptions.

It's unlikely the Arts Council will be present, for example, given that the book includes a robust attack on them in Rattle's own words "for knowing so little, for being such amateurs... with no expertise, no knowledge of history, to whom you have to explain everything, where it came from and why it is there, who don't listen and who don't care". The council's response has been no response at all beyond dismissing the remarks as "churlish".

It's also unlikely there will be many friendly faces from the British orchestral fraternity which is depicted in unflattering terms — haughty, clock-watching and uncommitted — by the book's author himself. And as the author is none other than Nicholas Kenyon, director of the BBC Proms and source of some of the choicest work these same orchestral players get, you can expect his words to generate a good deal of awkwardness.

But then the very publication of this book puts Kenyon in such a difficult position, relative to his responsibilities at the BBC, you might wonder why he's done it. The answer is that it's a piece of unfinished business begun when he was director of nothing: merely a simple, jobbing music critic and free to say whatever he liked. His text was originally published in 1987 and has been revised, rewritten and enlarged into the piece of work that Faber is issuing now.

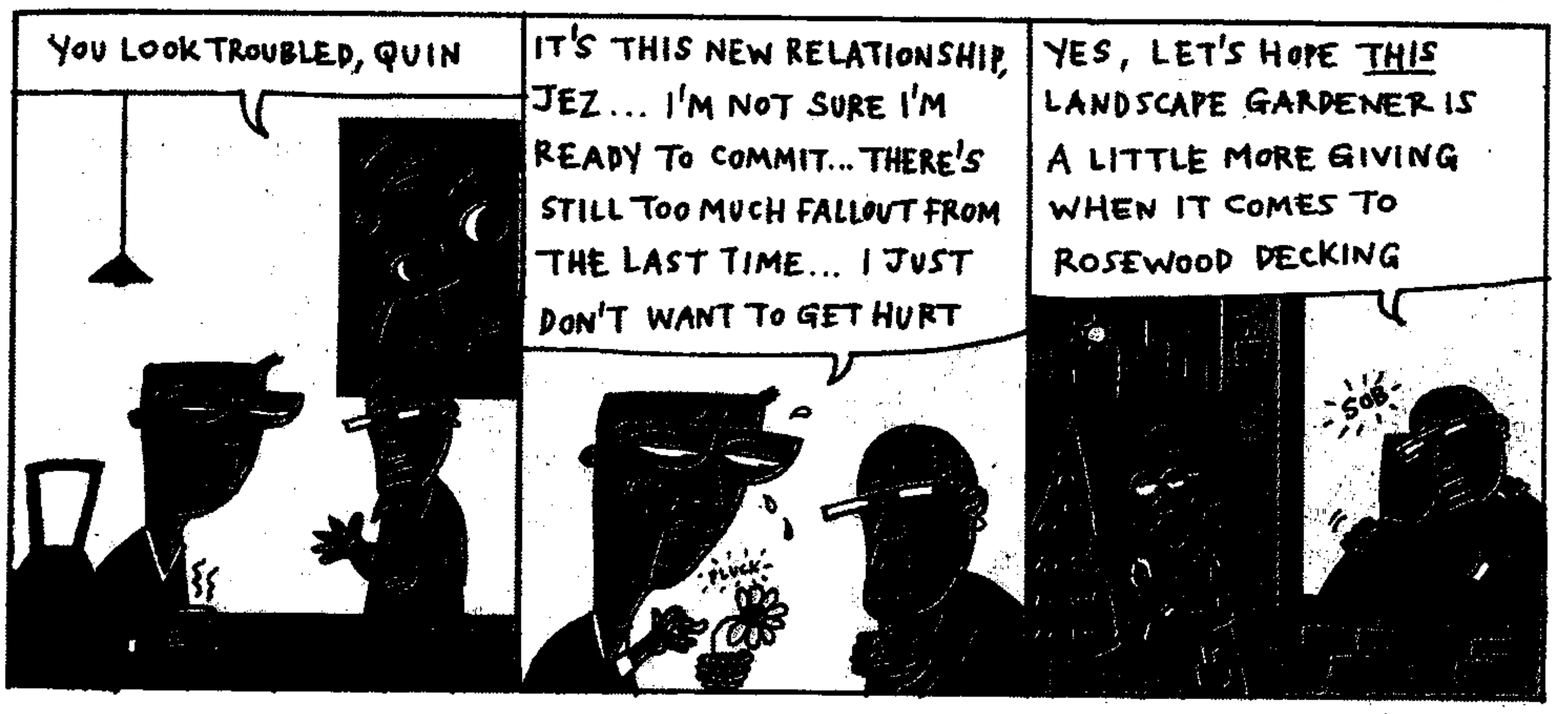
Which is fair enough. It's just that the revision and enlargement have been done with a surprising lack of tact. Still, at least Kenyon has made life easier for Rattle in one respect.

At one point in the 1987 version he has Rattle talking with disarming candour about the difficulties of Mahler's 8th Symphony. In the course of the quote, Rattle says: "If I could take my favourite 15 minutes out of the second part I would be happy never to hear the rest of it again. The more it tries to carry conviction the less successful it is." The new 2001 version carries the same quote about Mahler 8 but with those damning words filleted out. How very tactful. This will allow Sir Simon, should of course he wish to, conduct this symphony with his new orchestra, the Berlin Philharmonic, or even conduct it on his farewell recording with the old one, the CBSO, in 2004. He must be very grateful.

'Lunchtime O'Boulez'

IT'S GRIM UP NORTH LONDON

KNIFE & PACKER


YOU LOOK TROUBLED, QUIN
IT'S THIS NEW RELATIONSHIP, JEZ... I'M NOT SURE I'M READY TO COMMIT... THERE'S STILL TOO MUCH FALLOUT FROM THE LAST TIME... I JUST DON'T WANT TO GET HURT
YES, LET'S HOPE THIS LANDSCAPE GARDENER IS A LITTLE MORE GIVING WHEN IT COMES TO ROSEWOOD DECKING
PLUCK
SOB

Spoons Big and Small

From a phenomenal paddle spoon by Bill Phipps to Julie Arkell's paper creations, the gallery presents an innovative mixed media spoon exhibition.

Lesley Craze Gallery

ROTTEN BOROUGHS

TRICKY RIKKI

RICHARD "Rikki" Tod, Labour leader of Kettering borough council, fiddled his expenses in his job as a sales rep, an employment tribunal has heard — yet he doesn't seem to think he should resign as council leader.

While in most firms putting £1,200 of personal expenditure on one's company credit card would result in instant dismissal, the management of Metix, manufacturers of glue dispensing machines, er, stuck by their errant employee. Instead of being fired, Tod was allowed to repay the money, but had his credit card and mobile taken away and was redeployed on the factory floor.

After he made a series of cock-ups in his new job it was eventually decided he had to go. Even so, the company still tried to spare him political embarrassment. He was dismissed, but was offered "consultancy" work as a figleaf and was allowed to keep a company car and a computer.

Everyone appeared happy until Tod realised that, if he had been sacked, he wouldn't be able to claim on his mortgage protection insurance. So he asked Metix to confirm he'd been made redundant. Metix declined as it wasn't true — and so Tod put in a claim for unfair dismissal. The tribunal at Leicester decided that the dismissal had been unfair, in that Metix hadn't followed correct procedures, but then concluded that Tod's contribution to it had been "100 percent" — and that he didn't deserve a penny in compensation.

● **ANOTHER senior councillor nobly sticking to his post after a little financial difficulty is Ray Radford, a Tory on both Devon county and Mid-Devon district councils. As a result of action taken by the official receiver, Cllr Radford has been banned from acting as a company director for four years after his poultry feed haulage business went bust with debts of more than £530,000. The receiver found that Cllr Radford diverted money from Radfords Transport Ltd to pay wages and reduce liabilities in his other companies "to the detriment of creditors". The company went bust last year, but Cllr Radford managed to keep it quiet until last month. He sees "no reason" to stand down as a councillor, nor to give up two important financial posts — the chairmanship of the district council's finance sub-committee and a seat on the county council's investment and pension fund committee. Were Cllr Radford to quit, by the way, it would eliminate the Tories' one-seat majority over the Lib-Dems on Devon county council. And that would never do.**

LONELY JOB

FLINTSHIRE county council's legal director Andrew Loveridge has taken a strictly hands-off approach to an embarrassing constructive dismissal and whistle-blowing case against his council. Legal personnel from his department have failed to attend two pre-trial hearings of the case, leaving their barrister unsupported.

This is no run-of-the-mill employment case: it is being brought by Andy Sutton, former head of Flintshire's internal audit service, who alleges he was prevented from doing his job properly by Loveridge and chief executive Philip McGreevy (*Eyes passim*).

Sutton has lodged a total of 38 separate complaints alleging the failure of Loveridge and McGreevy to provide key documentation to him and raising concerns about their handling of audit cases. Some have already featured in this column, such as the unlawful £21,000 redundancy pay-off to old folks' home manager Jean MacFarlane (*Eye* 1004) and the River Lane fiasco in which the council managed to lose £700,000 over a botched land swap deal (*Eye* 1021). Further allegations, yet to emerge, concern the management of housing benefit, the alleged overpayment of a clerical support officer on the North Wales child abuse tribunal, a number of dodgy property management deals and an investigation into the current leader of the council, Alex Aldridge.

McGreevy and Loveridge now face an intensive washing of their dirty linen in a full public tribunal hearing set for March.

● **INDEPENDENT-cum-Conservative Fylde council in Lancashire has some noble "corporate objectives". Its primary "core values" are: "Respect and enrich local democracy" and "Listen to local people and adopt an open style".**

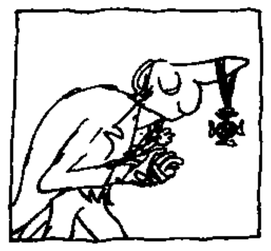
Presumably this was uppermost in the mind of planning chairman Cllr Trevor Fiddler [*sic*] when he responded to a 3,788 signature petition from residents of the genteel borough. The locals are angry at plans to flog off part of the historic Ashton Gardens park for an undisclosed sum, demolish its charming Victorian pavilion and chop down a grove of trees to make way for a speculative four-storey block of 57 flats. Adopting his best listening and open style, Cllr Fiddler declared: "It doesn't make any difference if 2,000, 3,000, 10,000 or the whole borough signed it." Planning permission for the eyesore was duly granted.

CAPITA PUNISHMENT

THE PEOPLE of Croydon have had a lucky escape. Their Labour-run council was all set to pay "outsourcing" specialists Capita (*Eyes passim*) a record £100m over seven years to run a call centre that would have been the first point of contact between the public and all council services. The deal fell through at the last minute after Crapita took umbrage at the outrageous suggestion that its performance should be monitored, with financial penalties for not hitting agreed targets.

All had appeared plain sailing for the contract to be signed on the nod after Labour councillors, at a meeting of the full council on 15 October, effectively strangled debate by supporting an obscure Lib Dem-sponsored motion concerning access to councillors' attendance records, rather than going along with a Tory motion to debate the huge contract to Crapita — by far the biggest the council had ever entered into with a private company. The deal fell through when Croydon's director of finance Jan Willis advised councillors they should not go ahead if Capita insisted on the penalty clauses being scrapped. At the same time Crapita, in the true spirit of public-private partnerships, issued a statement claiming it was they, not the council, who had pulled the plug on the deal.

O.B.N. SPECIAL



THE following motion has been put to the next full meeting of Durham city council by Lib Dem councillor Richard Ormerod: "That this council congratulates *Private Eye* magazine on its recent fortieth birthday and thanks the editors, past and present, for four decades of excellent investigative journalism." The councillors of "Britain's rottenest borough" (*Eye* 1001) have a chance to redeem themselves after all...

EDUCASHUN NEWS

ONE of the biggest and most lucrative property developments in Britain is about to be undertaken by a partnership consisting of Anglia Polytechnic University, where the chairman of the governors is Alan Cherry, and Countryside Properties, whose chairman is... Alan Cherry.

The *Essex Chronicle* devoted its front-page lead on 19 October to the story under the headline: £100M PLAN FOR TOWN CENTRE. Page 5 led with: UNIVERSITY SITE PLAN WILL REVITALISE CHELMSFORD. But no one seems to have thought to ask about any possible conflicts of interest.

The newspaper did though reveal that the massive contract to develop the university land with homes, shops, offices, bars, restaurants and an arts centre was won after a tendering process in which four firms took part.

When the *Eye* asked Anglia Polytechnic University whether the partnership with Countryside might have led to a potential conflict of interest for Alan Cherry, the university sent us a glamorous press release enthusing about the proposed development.

The final paragraph explained: "The competition's selection process was objective and rigorous. This was particularly important with the chairman of Countryside Properties, Alan Cherry, also being chairman of governors of APU. As a public body, it was especially important for APU to have unequivocal evidence of the objectivity and propriety of the selection process. Alan Cherry has had no part, at any time, in the selection process. Independent auditors have overseen the process and an audit certificate of compliance has been issued."

A spokesman for the university told the *Eye* that the decision to award the matter was dealt with by the deputy chair of governors, Mr Colin Day. The spokesman also said that the contract had been acceptable to the Higher Education Funding Council for England.

In a statement the HEFCE told a slightly different story. HEFCE funds were not involved, said a spokesman, but "we did point out the potential reputational risks to APU".

FACTS TO REMEMBER: Alan Cherry gets £522,000 a year as chairman of Countryside Properties. He sits on several government task forces, including the Urban Task Force and the East of England Development Agency.

YOUNG BRITISH ARTISTS

BY BIRCH

Lights going on and off in an empty room—call that Art?
MARTIN CREED
THE LIGHTS GOING ON AND OFF
Of course it is!
It's classic minimalism!
TURNER PRIZE SHOW
Although I wouldn't have bothered with the lights, personally.
It is rather gilding the lily...

DOING THE ROUNDS

HURRAH. The Commission for Health Improvement (CHI), which has doggedly claimed its "independence" since the government set it up 18 months ago and vetted its appointments, is now to be given "full independence".

CHI's 14 "new" Labour-appointed commissioners will now have the right to appoint their own chief executive, put substandard hospitals on "special measures" and publish "no holds barred" reports on the state of the NHS "even if they prove embarrassing for ministers".

To be fair to CHI, it has caused plenty of embarrassment already; but there are precious few signs of accountability in the department of health. How many damning reports can health secretary Alan Milburn sidestep before he steps down? Plenty, it seems. The health service ombudsman Michael Buckley has been churning out damning reports for years, each accompanied by a despairing note that the same problems keep recurring with little sign of improvement. The key black spots are the lack of transparency and accountability, and the difficulty investigating poorly managed complaints.

Even CHI is finding secrecy in the NHS hard to breach. It asked the DoH to hand over the unpublished Cameron report into widespread failures in the radiology department at Hammersmith hospital (*Eyes passim*) more than four weeks ago, but the DoH allowed the inquiry to be confidential – somewhat at odds with its spirit of openness – and is reluctant to release the information to CHI, which has a duty to publish its findings in full.

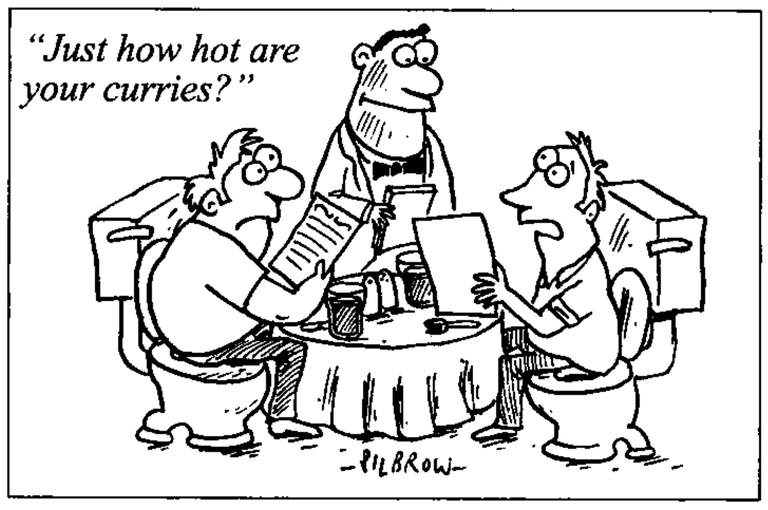
This has become all the more relevant because Hammersmith's radiology service has been the subject of five inquiries since "new" Labour took office, and it would be instructive to know if any of them had made a difference to patient safety. The latest, into the breast screening service, dates back to more than nine months ago when external auditor PriceWaterhouseCooper was called in to review more than 100,000 files after clerical errors were found. The service has been suspended for more than five months, but CHI is unlikely to publish its investigation until next spring.

Meanwhile the directorate manager Nuala Martin has quit, chief executive John Cooper is taking early retirement and medical director Prof Rory Shaw has taken over as the head of the National Patients Safety Agency (*Eyes passim*).

This trend of senior managers jumping ship just in time has surfaced again at the Royal United Hospital, Bath, which has been strongly criticised by CHI for its management style. Concerns were raised about the failings of the casualty department, the approach to risk management and "a serious disconnection between the executive team and the rest of the organisation." There was also "a slowness by the trust to address major issues", "an inner circle of management with limited focus on the needs of the wider staff group", "insufficient executive energy directed at the basic good care of patients" and significant staff changes "without proper process, advertisements and interviews". The chief executive, Barbara Harris, has since left the RUH to become… director of the NHS leadership centre! No, you couldn't make it up.

The RUH did at least get one of Mr Milburn's stars, partly thanks to the practice of hiding sick patients in ambulances to pass the 12-hour trolley wait target. But the ludicrously simplistic star system gave none to Ashford and St Peter's trust in Surrey, whereas CHI discovered "excellent risk management procedures, friendly and caring staff and effective and well-respected leadership." Its problems were down to delayed discharge (ie not enough beds in the community) and lack of staff (a widespread problem, unlikely to be helped by the no-star tag).

'M.D.'



DOWN ON THE FARM

AN AUDIENCE of Cumbria farmers was amazed the other day by a talk from Sir Brian Follett FRS, chairman of one of the three "pseudo inquiries" set up by the Beloved Leader to cover up the shambles he made of the great foot-and-mouth disaster.

On paper the remit of Sir Brian's Royal Society inquiry was to look into "the future handling of animal diseases", specifically including possible use of vaccination. But its real agenda, suggested cynics, was simply to make out that the government had made a terrific job of handling the crisis, and in particular to endorse the "slaughter-not-vaccination" strategy implemented by Sir Brian's friends and colleagues, most notably Blair's chief scientist Prof David King FRS, and the man he picked as FMD policy supremo, Prof Roy Anderson FRS.

So keen is Sir Brian to hurry on with that agenda, it seems, he has not even bothered to go through the motions of hearing evidence before announcing his conclusions. Although the closing date for written submissions to his inquiry is not until 30 November, he was already quite happy to give those startled Cumbrian farmers a preview of his committee's findings, and that "all the evidence so far" indicated that "we should continue with the present approach".

As for vaccination, his committee's view is that it is quite impracticable and can be ruled out for a long time to come. It is scarcely surprising this is the committee's view, since the only witnesses it has so far interviewed include all the leaders of the slaughter-not-vaccination brigade, notably professors King and Anderson, chief vet Jim Scudamore and, inevitably, Ben Gill of the NFU. Applications were made to the inquiry by the National Foot and Mouth Group and Compassion in World Farming to hear evidence in person from some of the world's leading veterinary scientists, including the Dutchmen Dr Simon Barteling and Dr Paul Sutmoller. But, because they strongly favour vaccination, Sir Brian apparently does not consider that such international experts have anything to contribute to his committee's thinking.

Meanwhile, out in the field the big question is how long Defra can hold the line on its insistence that the epidemic is over. The last case of FMD it is prepared to admit was confirmed on 30 September. The date is significant since, if it can continue to report outbreaks at zero, this would conveniently pave the way for resuming meat exports on 1 January next year. But rumours continue to surface of outbreaks which Defra refuses to confirm. A driver for Snowie, the contracting firm which has earned millions from transporting carcasses to disposal sites, recently asked a Cumbria farmer "why haven't the media picked up on the five cases we've dealt with in the last week? We've had two near Whitehaven, one near Keswick, another near Hexham. Defra hasn't admitted any of them."

Following events in Britain closely will be the European Commission, which has told Defra it is only prepared to pay 500 million euros of the 800 million Defra applied for under EU compensation rules. This is because the commission had found the British government was paying farmers way over market value for their animals, to buy their acquiescence in the slaughter of millions of animals which were healthy.

Despite claims that Brussels would foot 60 percent of the compensation bill, this means that, when the UK rebate is taken into account, the EU's final contribution will be less than 10 percent. An investigation by the commission's anti-fraud unit Olaf is still continuing.

'Even Newer Muckspreader'

SIGNAL FAILURES

First Great Western

IT WAS unfair of Andrew Lloyd Webber, after train journeys to Devon, to suggest First Great Western should be sued for being neither first nor great.

"Great" is a perfect adjective for the personal fortunes made (£3.7m, £3m, £2.2m x 5, £1.85m, £1.5m x 2) when managers sold the rest of their Great Western Trains company to bus operator First Group in 1998, shortly after seven of their passengers had died in the Southall crash (*Eye* 987).

"Great" also describes the scale of FGW fares increases. One *Eye* reader's fare increased by more than 300 percent when FGW – which gets nearly £50m of subsidy each year – made his normal ticket invalid on services at the times most people need to travel.

FGW fares hikes have borne no relation to the company's performance, and now FGW is the *first* train operator to be investigated under the 1993 railways act by the Rail Passengers' Council and its regional committees. Those watchdog committees are normally poodles (applicants are carefully screened to ensure the committees are free of people "the train companies wouldn't like"), but FGW's greed and delays have upset the members so much they are now beginning to bark.

The western England committee called FGW "dismal" because the company had excessively increased unregulated fares and car park fees, failed to run a reliable service despite having lengthened journey schedules, mishandled complaints and poorly managed Reading and Bristol Temple Meads stations.

FGW then became the *first* train operator to ban the official committees from conducting passenger surveys on its stations. Of course FGW had nothing to hide – it was just concerned passengers might be upset if they were asked their views while awaiting an FGW train.

FGW now is due to become the *first* train operator to be stripped of stations. After complaints of poor management, six Welsh stations including Cardiff Central are being transferred to the regional train operator. But First Group may yet have the last laugh: it's shortlisted to take over the Welsh regional franchise including the stations it doesn't run properly now.

A fitting end to this catalogue of errors would be for FGW to become, once the watchdog investigation has finished, the *first* operator stripped of its franchise outside the formal re-letting of franchises. But the opposite may happen. FGW is the *first* train operator in Britain pushing for a second franchise extension. Its horrendous track record won't count against it, as the awarding of the new South West Trains franchise to Stagecoach proves (*Eye* 1026). Transport secretary Stephen Byers wants franchises extended rather than re-let – to produce short-term benefits instead of long-term schemes like total modernisation of the Great Western mainline.

An extension granted while FGW is still being investigated by the watchdog committees would be a re-run of history; while Great Western Trains was being investigated for the Southall crash in 1997 it became the *first* train operator to gain a franchise extension (to 2006).

PS: Passengers can email their opinions on FGW to the investigation at western@railpassengers.org.uk

PPS: All FGW trains carry First Group's logo – an italicised F in a circle. The company warned staff not to refer to this as an "Effin' circle" (geddit?) under any circumstances, but passengers are free to make what they will of the flying F.

'Dr B. Ching'

Letters

Christmas message

Sir,

Having just listened to my splendid 40th anniversary CD-ROM I was wondering if you have any plans to release that charming little ditty "Tough, tough, tough on Crime" as a Christmas single? You never know, you could have a hit. After all, "Mistletoe and Wine" went to number 1.

Yours,
ADRIAN BURNS,
Via e-mail.

Sir,

God knows you've plumbed the depths before, but the contents of issue 1040 surely reached rock bottom.

*A free ****in' CD.*

Don't you realise that many of your 180,000 readers are recidivist wire twangers who think the world ended in 1975? And that the only piece of technology we possess is a wind-up alarm clock with a large bell on top? I tell you, if I could get some ink for my fountain pen I would cancel my subscription.

Yours,
CHRIS NANCOLLAS,
Via e-mail.

Grim up north?

Sir,

If British Muslims want to go and fight in Afghanistan, why don't they go and fight for the Northern Alliance?

Yours,
CAPTAIN J.I. HADDOCK,
Via e-mail.

It was a plant

Sir,

A recent libel settlement involving Greenpeace and the Glasgow Herald referred to a letter published under my name late in 2000 and was reported in the last Eye. However the letter was written by an agbioview network correspondent in London. It was sent to the Herald under my name and without my knowledge by an acquaintance to whom I had passed the letter electronically. He has since apologised to me. Investigation by the Herald, subsequent to the adjudication, established that the letter had not been written by me nor had I submitted it to them. I would appreciate it if the Eye could also make this clear.

ANTHONY TREWAVAS,
Professor in Plant Biochemistry.

Here is the news

Sir,

There was no inquest about BBC News 24's coverage of 11 September. Sky News and News 24 started reporting the story within a couple of minutes of each other. Through the afternoon, BBC1's output from News 24 got by far the biggest audience of any channel; and the press reaction was also overwhelmingly favourable. It's true we regularly broadcast an edited version of ABC's World News Tonight at 1.30am but unless you're an insomniac we don't otherwise opt into American networks – though I secretly enjoy the Californian car chases which Sky News uses to fill its duller moments courtesy of Mr Murdoch's American organ.

Yours,
ROGER MOSEY,
Head of BBC Television News, London W12.

Word of mouth

Sir,

I have just finished reading your superb Foot & Mouth special report. You cannot imagine how reassured I feel, knowing that in this time of international crisis and war, we have such competent and clear-sighted leadership. I'm sure that we all sleep more soundly in our beds.

Yours faithfully,
DAVID HEWITT,
London SW8.

Sir,

Congratulations on "Not The Foot & Mouth Report", quite the best review of the mess created by our government in dealing with the mess. I know Professor Ian Mercer personally, his report is also important. Your report to my total astonishment is without doubt what we have been waiting for. Thank you.

ERIC COWELL BSc, DipAg Sci, Cbiol, FIBiol,
Via e-mail.

High culture

Sir,

Alan Golding's Latin is better than his Greek (Letters, Eye 1040). The word "climax" means "ladder", or, by extension (ho ho), "an ascending series of expressions". Not much difference from "crescendo" really. Perhaps "high point" would have been safest.

Yours faithfully,
TIM SCOTT,
Repton, Derby.

Lookalike

Morris

Rattle

Sir,

The enclosed photographs show, as I have long suspected, that Jan Morris is the pen name of the eminent conductor Sir Simon Rattle. Sir Simon is about to take over the Berlin Philharmonic Orchestra, an evening job which will leave no time for gadding about the globe writing travel books. Hence the recent decision of 'Jan Morris' to retire.

I thought you ought to be told.

Yours faithfully,
MICHAEL KILGARRIFF,
London W5.

Following the Eye-Ching

Sir,

Dr B. Ching's analysis of the Railtrack fiasco seems critical of all parties except Stephen Byers and the government. I realise that greedy fund managers are too tempting a target to resist, but surely you don't actually think that the compulsory administration forced upon Railtrack shareholders by the government is lawful?

MARK REILLY,
Via e-mail.

Sharp note falls flat

Sir,

Of course there's such a note as B-sharp (Letters, 1040) – try playing a scale of C-sharp major without it. It may look and sound the same as C on a piano keyboard, but it's still B-sharp and not C or even D double flat. And if you play it on an instrument that's not constrained by equal temperament, it doesn't even sound the same as C. Mr Whitehurst's Grade 4 cornet is presumably of the ice-cream variety.

Yours enharmonically,
NICK RAMPLEY,
London SE24.

● *Many thanks for the other 50-odd learned letters pointing out Mr Whitehurst's error while explaining the intricacies of enharmonics. Ed.*

Clerihew Corner

Carter Ruck
Have come unstuck;
Private Eye
Don't lie.

MICHAEL DE-LA-NOY,
Bedford.

Colemanballs

£10 paid for contributions

"I'm not going to drag it out or make a point, because points are pointless."
SIMON JORDAN (Crystal Palace FC Chairman), BBC1
(David Spraggett)

"Their away record is instantly forgettable. The 5-1 defeat and 7-nil defeat spring to mind."
BBC Radio 5 Live
(Oliver Presswood)

"Every green seat has a bottom on it, and they've made some noise in here tonight."
JOHN RAWLING, RADIO 5 Live
(David James)

"We have to be careful not to let our game not be the game we know it should be."
PAUL INCE, BBC Online
(Stephanie Ede)

HOM SAP

BY DAVID AUSTIN

FUNNY OLD WORLD

COMPILED BY **VICTOR LEWIS-SMITH**

"The majority of people get through this without a nick or a blister," Robert Kallen of The Achievement Group told a press conference at the Ocean Reef Club in Key Largo, Florida, "but when you're walking over hot coals, anything can happen. When you see a hundred people do it, and fifteen or so need medical treatment afterwards, I don't term that unusual. Some people just have incredibly sensitive feet, that's all."

Kallen was speaking after more than a dozen Burger King marketing-department workers sustained severe burns to their feet while walking over coals, as part of the corporate bonding experience he was

supervising. "I have no regrets about organizing the event," said Dana Frydman, vice-president of product marketing for Burger King. "It made you feel a sense of empowerment, and that you can accomplish anything, and that's what it was supposed to do."

But one participant, who did not wish to be named, took a different view. "It's insane. Everyone knows that the coals are supposed to have almost burned themselves out before people walk on them. But Kallen told us to start walking when they were still white-hot, and this is what happens. It used to be only the burgers that were flame-grilled at Burger King. But now, apparently, it's the staff too. Odd thing though. The aroma of burning feet definitely has the edge on how our flame grilled specials smell after three minutes under the grill. *(South Florida Sun-Sentinel, 6/10/01. Spotter: John Fletcher)*

—o—

"It is decreed that, in accordance with the wise edict of King Mswati III, all of our nation's young women will stop having sex for the next five years," Lungile Ndlovu (the royally-appointed leader of Swaziland's maidens) told students at St Mark's High School in Mbabane. "Wherever you go, Swazi girls will be expected to wear an "umcwasho" (a bundle of bright traditional tassels), to signify celibacy. Furthermore, long trousers will be forbidden for young girls, in addition to miniskirts which were banned last year. Swazi women know their culture. We should look like girls, not boys. Breaking the ban will be punishable by a fine not exceeding one half cow."

But King Mswati's ambitious plan to rid his country of HIV failed to impress students. "Many of the girls here are already having sex and will find it very hard to stop," said Lydia Katuramu, "and the thing about tassels is totally out. My mum thinks I should wear it, but my dad thinks it's stupid. He says we'll look like social imbeciles, and he's right." (Sydney Morning Herald, 1/10/01. Spotter: Norm Reynolds)

—o—

"I was angry then and I'm still angry now," Keith Turner told reporters in Albuquerque. "Those are my mother-f***** tax dollars and your tax dollars that they're wasting. Those mother-f***** police helicopters cost hundreds of dollars an hour to fuel and maintain, and they've no mother-f***** business using them to fly in and out of Krispy Kreme stores, just to buy mother-fucking doughnuts."

Eye-witness Turner was speaking after an Albuquerque police officer and his pilot had been suspended, following an incident in which a police helicopter was used to buy takeaway food. "According to reports," said police spokesman Brian McCutcheon, "the pilot and a police officer landed the copter outside the Krispy Kreme store. They both went inside with the engine still running, bought a dozen doughnuts, then came back out and took off. So far we've been given no reasonable excuse as to why they would even think they could do this, but there could be some very serious ramifications. We don't know whose brain child it was, but it's quite an ugly child."

The two suspended officers are being investigated for possible misuse of city funds, as well as for safety reasons. *(Reuters News Agency, 5/10/01. Spotter: Brendan Joseph O'Byrne)*

Pseuds Corner

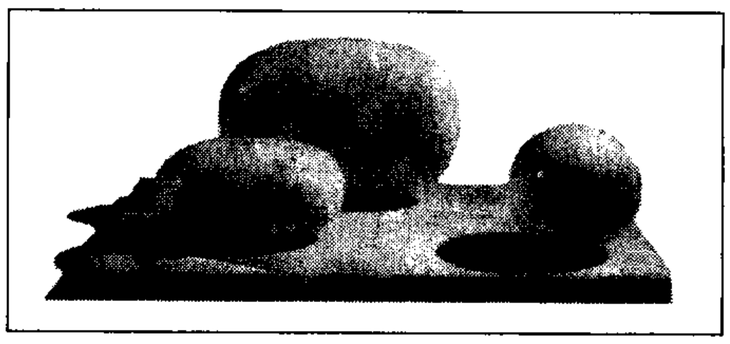
We are studying the modalities of a further participation in the action.

French spokesman on the possibility of joining the war in Afghanistan
Daily Telegraph

The set elements introduced to *Before and After* by [Sarah] Lucas – underwear, fluorescent lighting tubes and an enormous masturbating arm – are just the kind of thing that gained her a reputation as an in-your-face, confrontational artist.

...I did a whole show in Berlin that dealt with wanking. I realised that wanking is mechanical, as regular as a clock. Sex is about rhythm and time – think of a woman's fertility cycles – and I realised dance is about the same thing. It is structured in time."

Adrian Searle on Michael Clark's new dance show, *Guardian*



I don't know what Hepworth intended – laying down these sensuous forms on a bed of marble – but when I look at them, they and my body meet in stages of desire.

There is nothing abstract or mathematical here – though there is the sum of the universe, hewn in love.

Count philosophy, count number, count ratio, count space, and when you have counted all, feel it under your skin – the place where art lives, the place where love lives.
Beauty is desire.

JEANETTE WINTERSON on Barbara Hepworth's 'Three Forms', *Independent*

Inside, the Tate's curators were waxing lyrical about the works. Simon Wilson, curator of interpretation, said that Creed was redefining art's boundaries and likened his room to "life itself".

"It makes me think of mortality," he said. "One moment it's on, the next moment it's not. Human life is just a blink in the cosmos," he added. "Art had been reflective since the Renaissance.

"The visitor becomes part of the art through the simple act of entering the room. You're illuminated and then not illuminated."

The Times

The good thing about being Australian is that you have great social mobility. I can go from a barbie at Buck House to hanging out with my girlfriends in those tower blocks, the single mothers.

KATHY LETTE
Evening Standard

Pseuds Corporate

We don't have a mission statement, just some favourite words: creativity, credibility, curry, dedication, detail, empathy, experience, flexibility, fun, goodwill, humility, inspiration, integrity, motivation, obsession, optimism, pace, pants, personality, positive, professionalism, progress, sausages, synergy, technical know-how, value and work-rate.

e-mail sign-off by Lewis PR

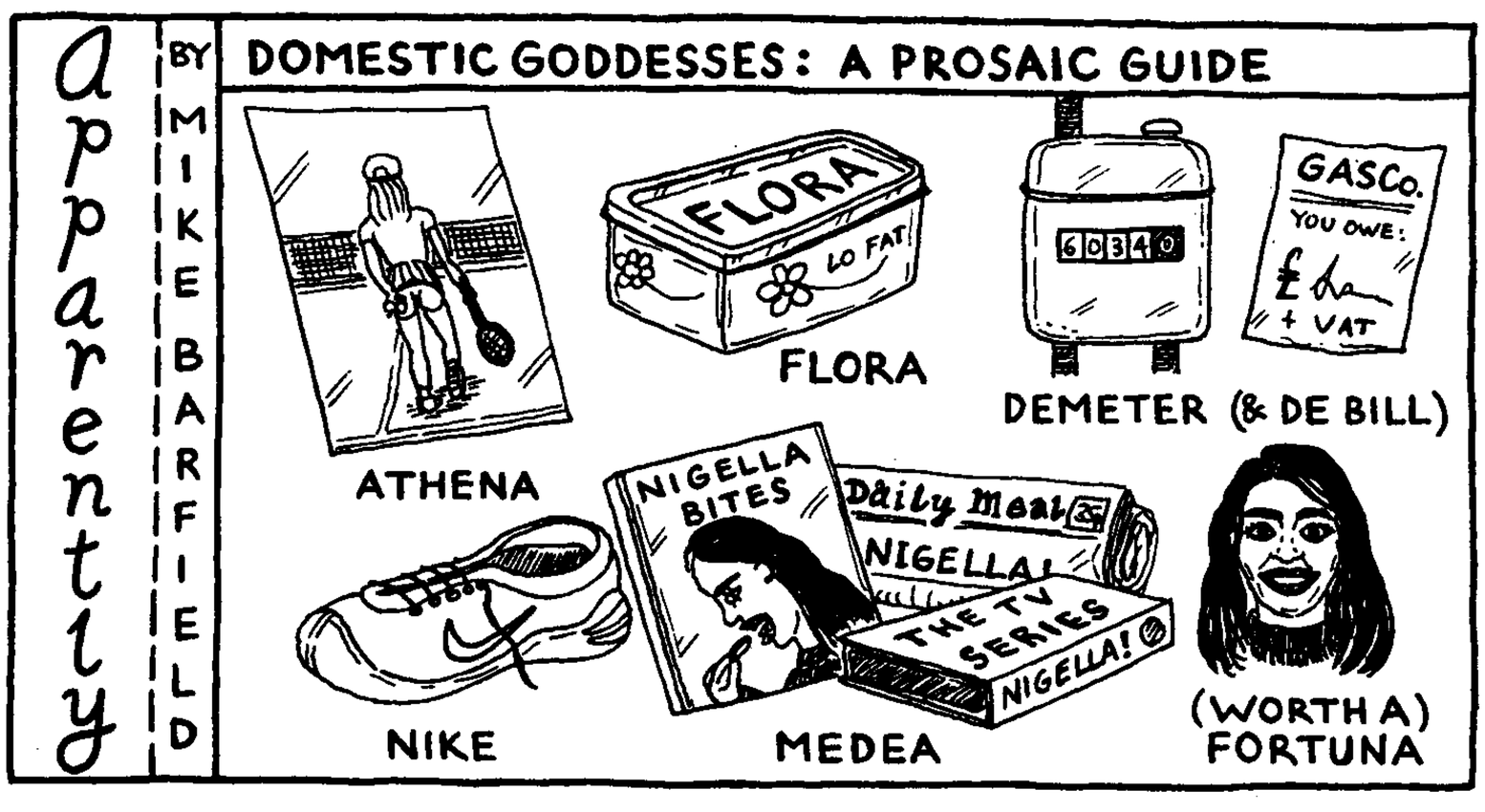
Q: Why are we writing the word Thus in capitals all of a sudden?

A: A business decision has been taken to write the word THUS in capitals in all written forms to capture and replicate our value which encourages our employees and our business to 'Act with boldness, simplicity and speed'.

From the Thus plc corporate intranet site's 'Your questions answered' page

CONTRIBUTORS: Michael Gunnison, Geraldine Besgrove, Strobes (x2), Anon (x2), C.J. Apperley.

£10 paid for entries



BLAIR'S PLAN FOR THE NEW AFGHANISTAN PARLIAMENT

1. A new reformed House of Warlords to be selected by an independent commission.

2. The independent commission to be comprised of former warlords appointed by an independent select committee.

3. The independent select committee to consist of senior warlords appointed directly by T. Blair (King).

4. That's enough. Ed.

Plan devised by the Head of the Prime Minister's Delivery Unit, the Chief Dalek Lord Birt of Suit.

Photo Exclusive To All Newspapers

SAS GO IN!

Soldiers of the type that might possibly be members of the SAS if they were there when the photo was being taken, which they probably weren't

BLUNKETT ARRESTED UNDER NEW TERRORIST LAW

by **Phil Jails**

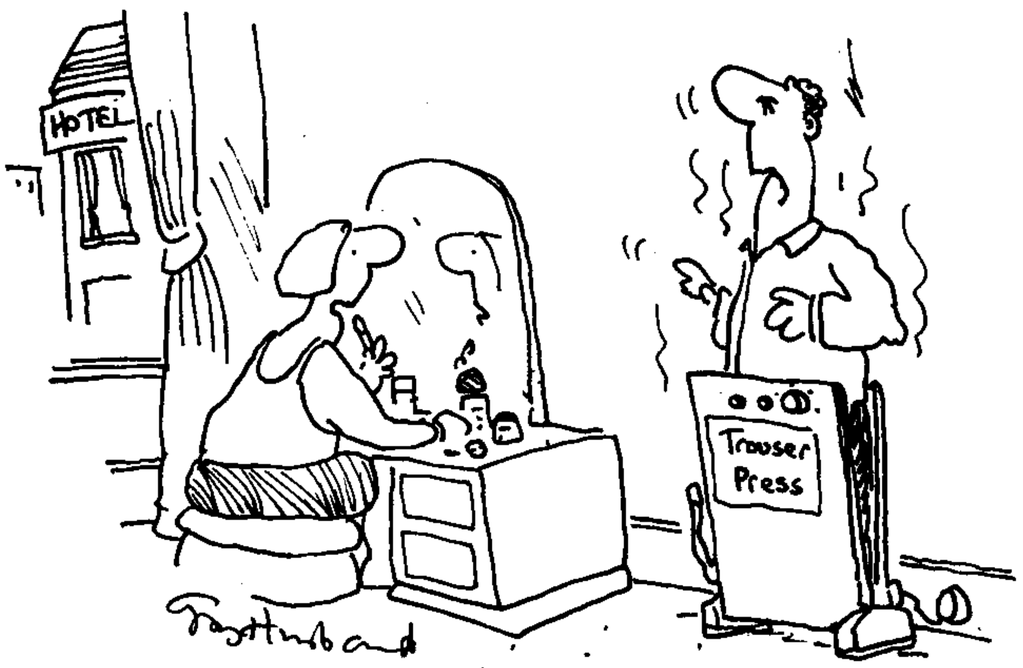
A SINISTER-looking blind man with a beard was arrested yesterday near the House of Commons under the new Detention of Dodgy-Looking Bearded Men Act (2001).

Under the new act, any dodgy-looking bearded men can be detained at Her Majesty's Pleasure without trial, charge or evidence. Only a beard is needed by the police as proof that the man in question is a danger to civilised values, such as freedom to walk around without being arrested.

BLUNKETT COVERAGE

David Blunkett last night was delighted at his arrest.

"This is a triumph for justice," he said. "It shows that none of us is safe under my new regulations."



"Aren't you supposed to take your trousers off?"

The Sun

IS OZZIE GAY?

TEN TELL-TALE SIGNS THAT PROVE BIN LADEN IS A POOF

1 Wears a dress
2 Long beard
3 Funny eyes
4 Hangs around with other men in caves
5 Supports the Talibum
6 Arse-nal fan
7 Big fan of Judy Garland
8 Has four wives and 45 children
9 Er...
10 Well, he's got to be, hasn't he?
11 No offence to the gay community
12 That's it

Who's In The Running For Scotland's Top Job?

The Eye's Cut-Out-And-Keep Guide

1. JENNY MCPENNY *(MSP for Glen Isskinnoch),* 38, high-flying woman you have never heard of who has said she doesn't want the job.

2. Hugh McHee *(MSP for Dinnaeken),* 57, high-flying Scotsman from the lowlands about whom very little is known.

3. Tony McCrony *(MSP for Fettes),* 63, high-flying friend of Mr Blair who will probably get the job.

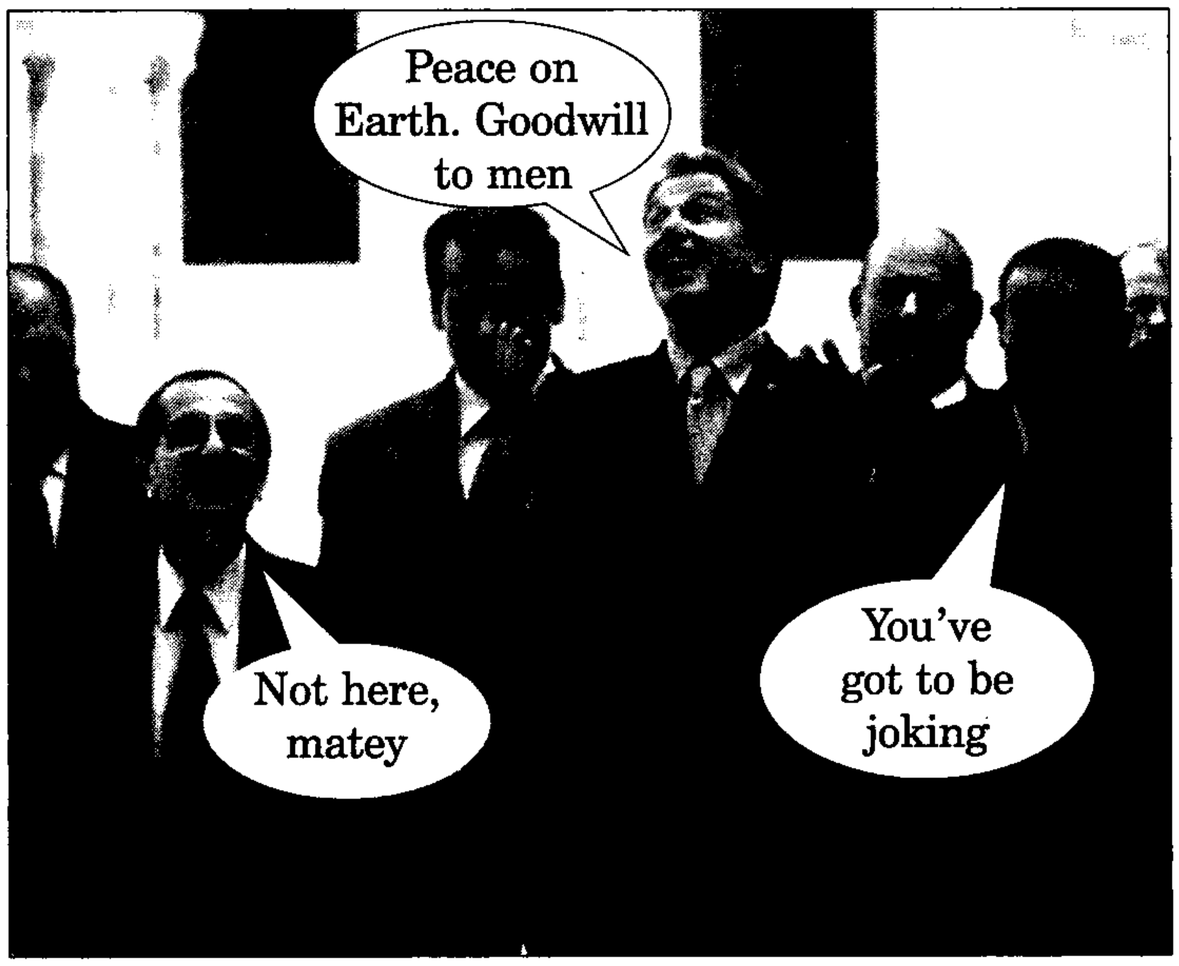
4. Gordon McBrownnose *(MSP for Ben Doon),* 47, high-flying chief of the clan McBrownnose. Was at school with Gordon Brown so he may get the job if McCrony doesn't.

5. Rory McSleaze *(MSP for Dunfiddlin),* 57, high-flying crook who is in prison for embezzlement, which may be a handicap to his ambitions of becoming Scotland's First Minister.

6. Osama McBin Laden *(MSP for Fingal's Cave),* 94, high-flying outside candidate who lives somewhere in the Hebrides.

(That's enough candidates. Ed.)

ROAD TO DAMASCUS



ST ALBION PARISH NEWS

Incumbent: Rev. A.R.P. Blair MA (Oxon)

Hullo! (Or should it be Salaam?)

As we enter the holy season of Ramadan, our thoughts go out to all our fellow-believers across the world!

And I'm in a special position to know how they feel, since in the two weeks since I last addressed you in this newsletter I have personally flown around the world 18 times!

And let's just stop for a minute to think what that word "Ramadan" means. It is the time of year when we all prepare for the great event of Christmas.

And the real message of Ramadan is "What are we doing, and where are we going?"

And in my case we could even add "Where have you been?"

OK, I'll tell you. I've had top level multi-faith meetings with some of the top Muslims in the world, even though most of them wouldn't speak to me.

But do I look on that as a set-back? Heavens no! Or should I say "Allah be praised!"

Isn't it only by being rejected that we manage to put our message across?

OK, so Mr Assad was a little bit rude in suggesting in public that people like me should have their eyes put out and fed to the vultures. But many Muslims have a different way of showing their hospitality!

And, let me tell you, in private, it was a very different matter!

Mr Assad and I had very constructive talks, and he was particularly helpful in telling me the quickest way back to the airport.

I can tell you that my visit to Damascus made me think of another famous journey along that road!

Can any of the children tell me who I'm talking about?

No, Justin, not Mr Mandelson on his holiday. The one I'm thinking about was the great saint who "saw the light", and there, surely, is a message which is particular to us all in these dark times!

And that's what I've been trying to do, as I go round the world!

To find common ground between all the faiths in the great battle between "good" and "evil"!

And isn't that just what Harry Potter is trying to tell us?

"He who is not with me is against me" *(Book of Hogwarts 12.30)*

That is what it's all about. And that is what I've been trying to tell our Muslim friends, and everyone else for that matter. (I'm not mentioning any names obviously, but Mr Shanon will know who I mean!)

So let's hear no more of this nonsense about how I've been neglecting the parish recently, just because I've been trying to bring peace to the world!

Look, if I wasn't doing this, it is pretty likely that there wouldn't be any parish left to run, let alone for the rest of you to live in!

So, let's all think about that, shall we, as

we fast through the holy month of Ramadan? And, incidentally, have you all bought your Ramadan calendars yet? They're on sale in the vestry, and all profits will go to the very exciting "Islamic Awareness Week" which is being run by Mr Brown's wife Sarah!

Your (rather jet-lagged friend)

Tony

A Message Of Support For The Vicar In All He Is Doing, by Mr Prescott, who has been in charge of the parish while Tony is away.

Tony has our unadulated support in seeking to find a way forward through the common ground to reach a position whereby all sides can be coalitioned down the middle to form a broad-band radio to achieve maximum compact within the parameters laid down for world peace which is what we are all seeking, and which can only be effected through recourse to armed confliction.

(Thanks, John, I think we've all got the idea! A.C.)

A STATEMENT FROM CHERIE BOOTH QC

I WOULD like to issue a legal warning to Mrs Bahji Vas, proprietor and sole owner of 'Vedic Life Rays R Us', the alternative healing centre above the fish 'n' chip shop in the High Street. Although I have purchased a number of items from Mrs Vas's shop, including a traditional Gujarati bio-electric amulet to ward off carcinogenic radiation from laptop computers and a pair of inflatable holistic trousers to prevent the build-up of cellulite, I did not at any point give Mrs Vas permission to use my name as the vicar's wife to promote the business. And I hereby give notice to Mrs Vas that if she ever tries again to cash in on my status within the parish, I will bring an action against her under the Human Rights Act and she could soon find herself looking down the wrong end of a legal bill which could very easily rise to a sum in excess of £1 million.

Parish Postbag

Dear Vicar,

Those of us who are old enough to remember the last World War are increasingly dismayed by your manic sermons about the desirability of starting World War Three. Your rabid and bellicose rantings in recent weeks have been

Yours sincerely,
Denis Healey, "Silly Billy",
Eyebrow Crescent

The Editor reserves the right to cut all letters from elderly parishioners of unsound mind, and furthmore to refer them to the police for prosecution under the Treason Act 1351.

To Remember In Your Prayers

■ Mr Byers, who has been having trouble lately with remembering some rather important facts about what he did or didn't tell the PCC. Let us pray that Stephen doesn't have to resign, but if he does, we all wish him the very best in his new job, whatever it may be! T.B.

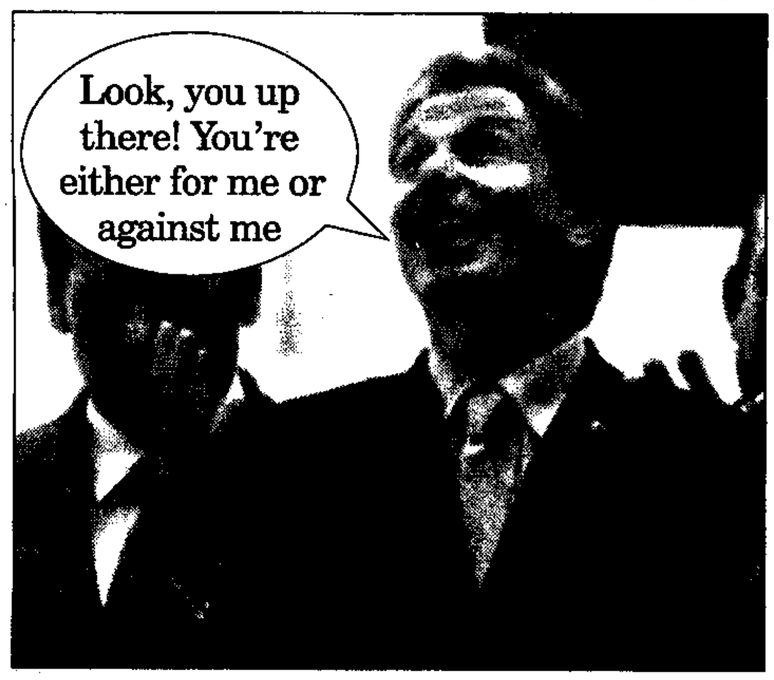
VALETE

Mrs Hunter is to leave us to take up a new job at the BP Petrol Station on St Albion's roundabout. We all wish her well in her new appointment and there are no hard feelings on my part at this scandalous betrayal. The fact that Mrs Hunter would be a complete nobody if she hadn't been lucky enough to be at school with the vicar is neither here nor there. In the current circumstances the vicar feels it would be inappropriate to give her a farewell party or a leaving present or indeed ever to talk to her again. As it says in the Good Book "Good Riddance to Bad Rubbish" (*Exodus 17.3*) T.B.

ALSO VALETE

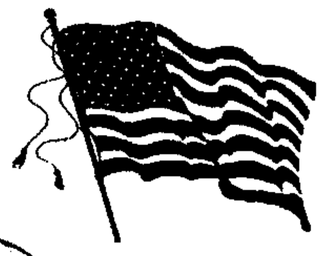
Mr McLeish T.B.

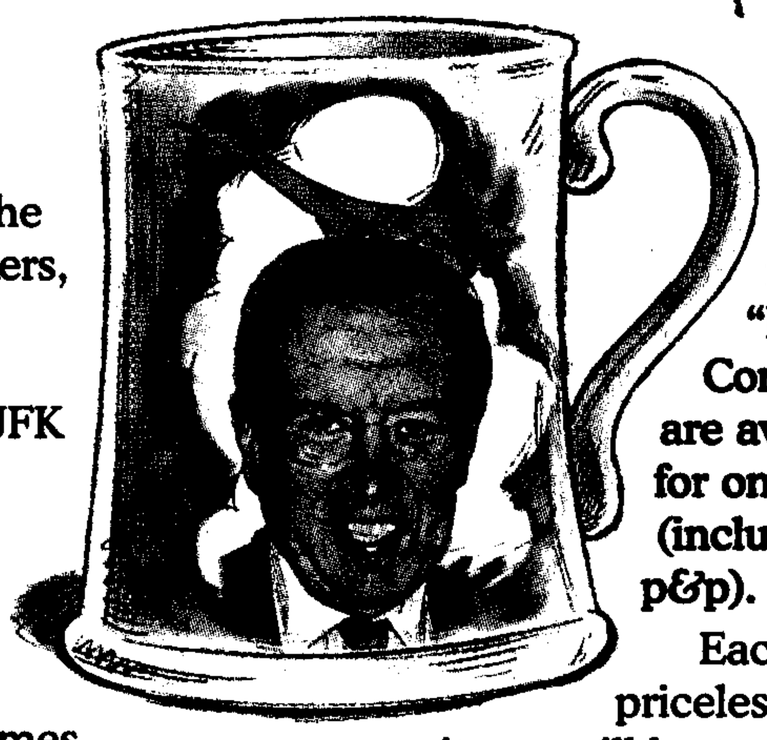
THE VICAR SPELLS IT OUT!



•••• Gnome Special ••••

Frost Commemorative Mug Offer





A great British invention takes to the air again! New Yorkers, headed by their popular Mayor Giuliani, thronged JFK airport to welcome the most legendary British export of them all, Sir David Frost, now resuming his four-times weekly flights across the Atlantic, after a year when he has been tragically grounded. World-famous artist Sir Ralph Stoddy, Fellow of the Royal Society of Commemorative Ceramic Mug Designers and Engravers, captures the unique moment when this much-loved symbol of all that is best in modern Britain boards his favourite aeroplane for its historic flight.

A limited edition of 5 million "Frost-on-Concorde" mugs are available now, for only £1.95 each (including VAT, p&p).

Each of these priceless heritage items will be treasured for generations to come. Not only will they enhance the beauty of your home, they will be a wonderful investment for you, your children, your children's children and their live-in partners.

WARNING

The value of commemorative mugs may go down as well as up. Commemorative mug values are monitored by Offmug, the regulatory body responsible for supervision of the commemorative mug industry.

Send money now to Gnome Frost Mug Offer, Unit 16B, The Trading Estate, Chorleywood NBG 123

Exclusive to all newspapers

CHAMPAGNE FLIES AS CONCORDE FLOWS IN

by Lunchtime O'Booze

FANTASTIC! That wash the word that wash on the lipsh of every journalisht (writes Bill Deedesh) as the corks lifted gracefully off the bottlesh of champagne and flew across the cabin of Concorde at shupershonic shpeed.

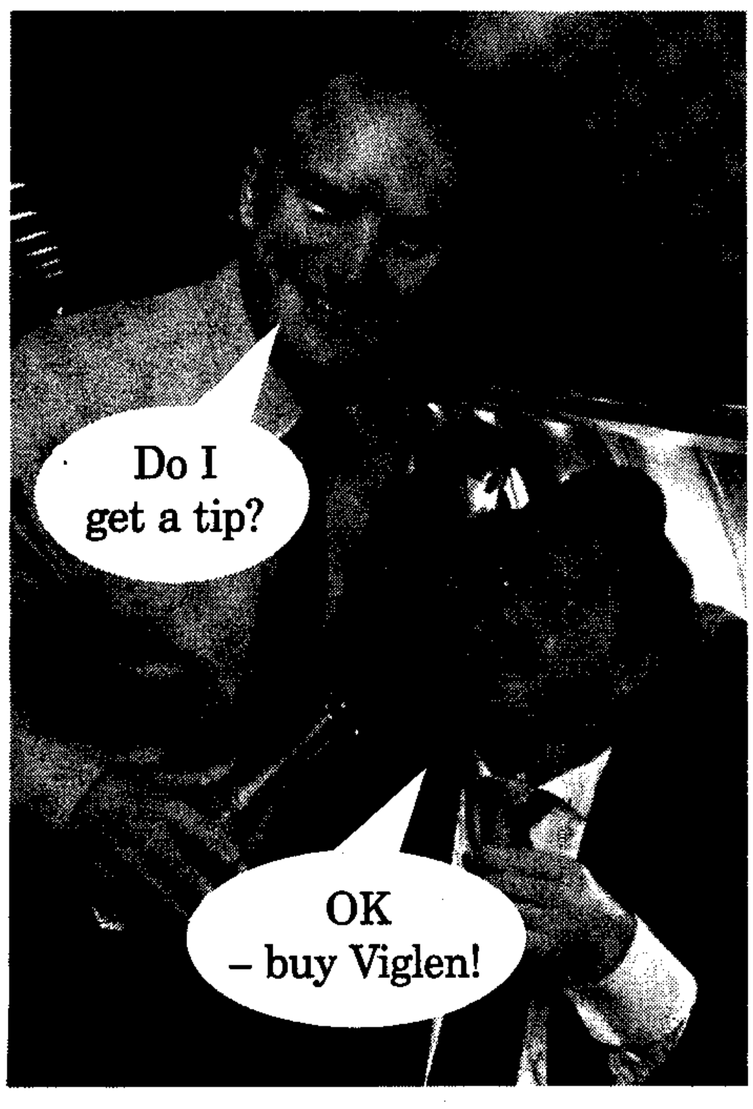
There ish no doubt that the bringing of Concorde back into shervice after a year hash been the perfect reminder to our American friendsh that British journalists are the drunkesht in the world.

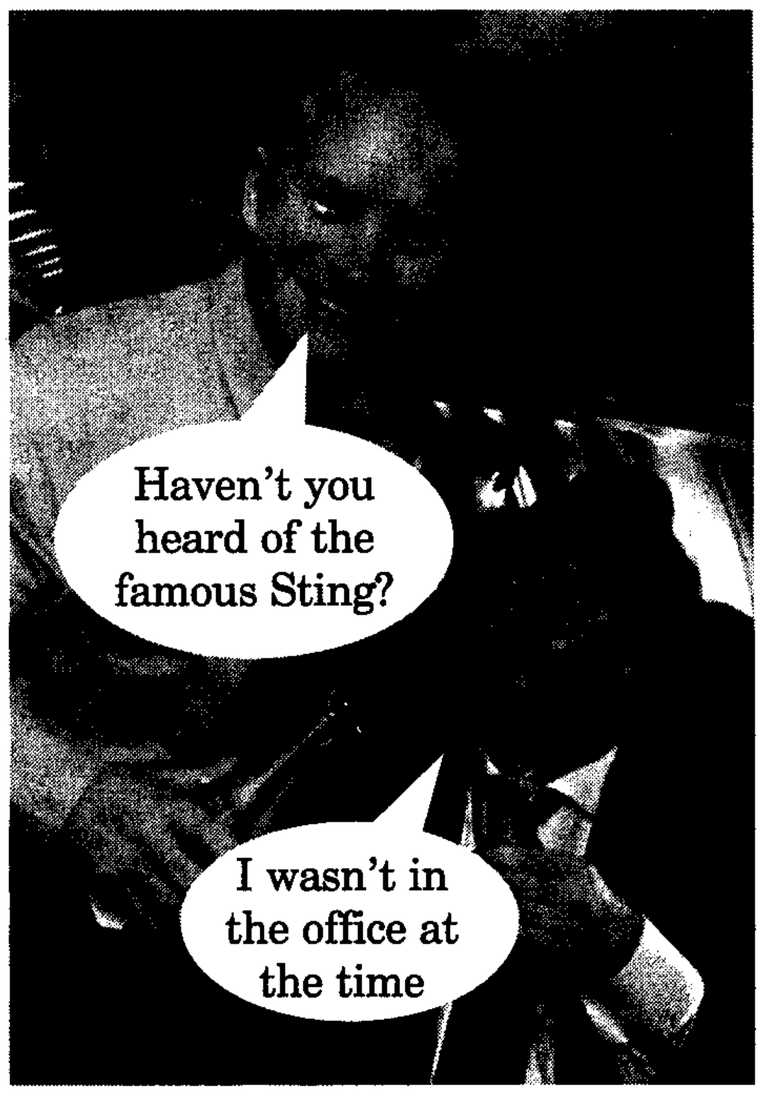
As we touched down in wherever it was, our heartsh went out to all thoshe who'd laid on this terrific shpree!

On Other Pages

CITY NEWS: British Airways Faces Bankruptcy Following £500 Million Concorde Drinks Bill

MIRROR EDITOR BRAVELY GOES ON FREEBIE WITH CELEBRITIES





POLLY FILLER AT THE HARRY POTTER PREMIÈRE

THERE's only one word for this film – Magic! Wizard! Spell-binding! And I'm not saying that just because yours truly was one of the A-list celebrities invited to buy tickets for the movie world's most glamorous first night in years!!

No! I can honestly say that from the moment I took my seat next to TV's Kelly Brook's mother and right behind Jonathan Ross's brother's wife I knew I was in for a night of celluloid sorcery on a grand scale.

For us lovers of the books who know every detail of Hogwash Hall and all the rules of the game of Quidnunc, it could have been a disappointment. But instead the director had created the Potter universe exactly as I had imagined it! There was Harry with his broomstick and his trademark glasses, just as he appears on the Woolworth's pencil sharpener! And there were his friends Rob Wursley and Hermione Gingold – larger than life and twice as enchanting!

But enough of what us 30-something children think. What about the *real* children in the audience?

I took along my toddler Charlie who has read all five books and reckons that he is the number one Harry Potter fan in the world – even though he is only 3½!

He loved the film so much that he spent the first half of it banging his seat up and down in appreciation! And in the second half he ran along the aisles throwing popcorn at J.K. Rowling as a tribute to his heroine!

And when it ended, a tired but delighted Charlie gave his own verdict. So, here's his very first cinema review!

Charlie's Review

Any attempt to translate the Potter oeuvre into cinema runs the risk of betraying the original literary vision of the author. Fortunately, the narrative has been successfully transposed into a gothic film noir genre with obvious "homages" to the Hammer canon and the later work of Tim Burton with an overlay of Spielbergian special effect finesse that serves to reinforce the Manichean evil vs. good, dark vs. light, Voldemort vs. Potter paradigm.

My verdict: Can I have an ice cream, Mum?

What more can one say? Watch out, Barry Norman – there's a new kid on the block. And I don't mean Harry Potter!

© Polly Filler 2001.

THE SUN SAYS

We're Potty about Harry!

THE SUN salutes Britain's young film stars who have set the world alight with their delightful performances as Harry Potter and his friends.

A bright future beckons for Daniel, Emma and Rupert. It makes you proud to belong to a country that can produce such fresh and original talent!

Let's just hope that Daniel, Emma and Rupert don't follow the paths of so many other child stars and embark on a downward spiral of drugs and alcohol-fuelled debauchery which will leave them burnt out in the gutter at sixteen, to the despair of their parents and the shame of a sickened nation.

THE SUN says: Anything that comes into our heads.

WAR BREAKS OUT AS PEACE PROCESS IS SAVED

by Our Northern Ireland Correspondent **Ulster Rantzen**

FIERCE fighting last night broke out in Stormont to celebrate the saving of the Northern Ireland peace process from collapse.

Groups of rival politicians kicked, punched and jostled each other to express their delight at the re-election of Mr Trimble as First Minister of the devoted Assembly, thus guaranteeing that the province was put firmly back on the road to peace.

Armed security men broke up the peace celebrations with rubber bullets, water cannons and tear gas.

Rubber Ballots

Said one senior member of the Group Four Community Policing Service (formerly the Royal Ulster Constabulary), "There will always be a few troublemakers in the Assembly who refuse to believe in the democratic process, but we know who they are."

Rev. Ian Paisley is 91.

How The First Minister Is Elected

A CONSTITUTIONAL expert writes: "In order to be elected as First Minister, the candidate must secure an overall majority of 43 percent of members of his own party, and not less than 37 percent of all opposition parties. If, for any reason, he fails to secure this majority, the other parties have to change their names. For example, the Alliance Party may become known as the David Trimble Fan Club (see para 73.1 of the Good Grief Agreement). This is essential since it is the only democratic way to avoid having an election."

YES! IT'S OFFICIAL!

by Our News Staff **William Cashingin**

★ IT's the news we've all been waiting for! **Liz Hurley** is going to have a big bouncing story! Friends of Ms Hurley (Charles Moore) said that he was delighted.

"I was beginning to think she would never be on the front page again and that time was running out. But now she is in the family newspaper way and we can all celebrate!"

Ms Hurley is reported to be feeling fine but readers of the Telegraph are already getting morning sickness when they pick up their newspaper to find yet another photo of her on the front page.

Said Ms Hurley, "If it's a boy, I'm going to call him Daily, after the famous newspaper. If it's a girl, I'm going to call her Telegraphia."

(That's enough rubbish. Ed.)

As a contribution to world peace, Eye readers are invited to sign this historic pledge

Eye Pledge To The Muslim Community

I HEREBY promise that at all times, both now and in the future

- *I will be nice to all Muslims.*
- *I will do nothing to upset them, such as burning down their mosques or throwing stones through their windows.*
- *I will offer a drink to every Muslim I meet in a pub.*
- *I promise to read the Koran every night before going to bed, like Mr Blair does.*
- *I promise never to laugh at any jokes about any Muslims that I may hear from anyone at any time, especially the one about the Englishman, the Irishman and Osama bin Laden.*

I am over 18, and my name is not Iain Duncan Smith.

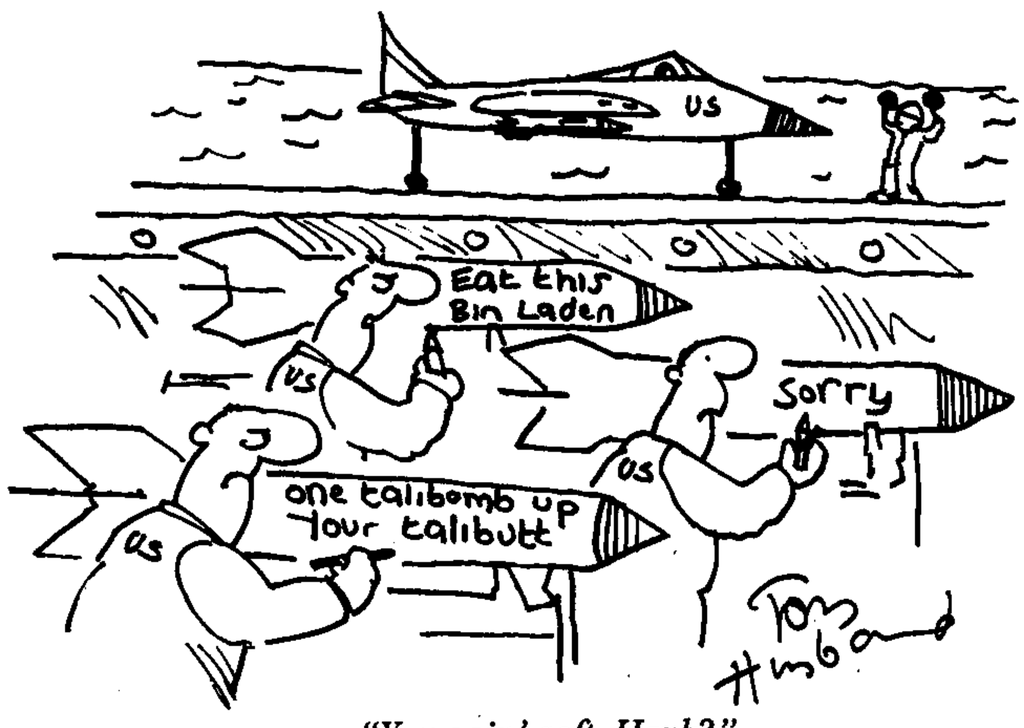
Signed .....

Send to Mrs Gordon Brown, 11 Downing Street, London SW11

As a contribution to world peace, Eye Muslim readers are invited to sign this historic pledge

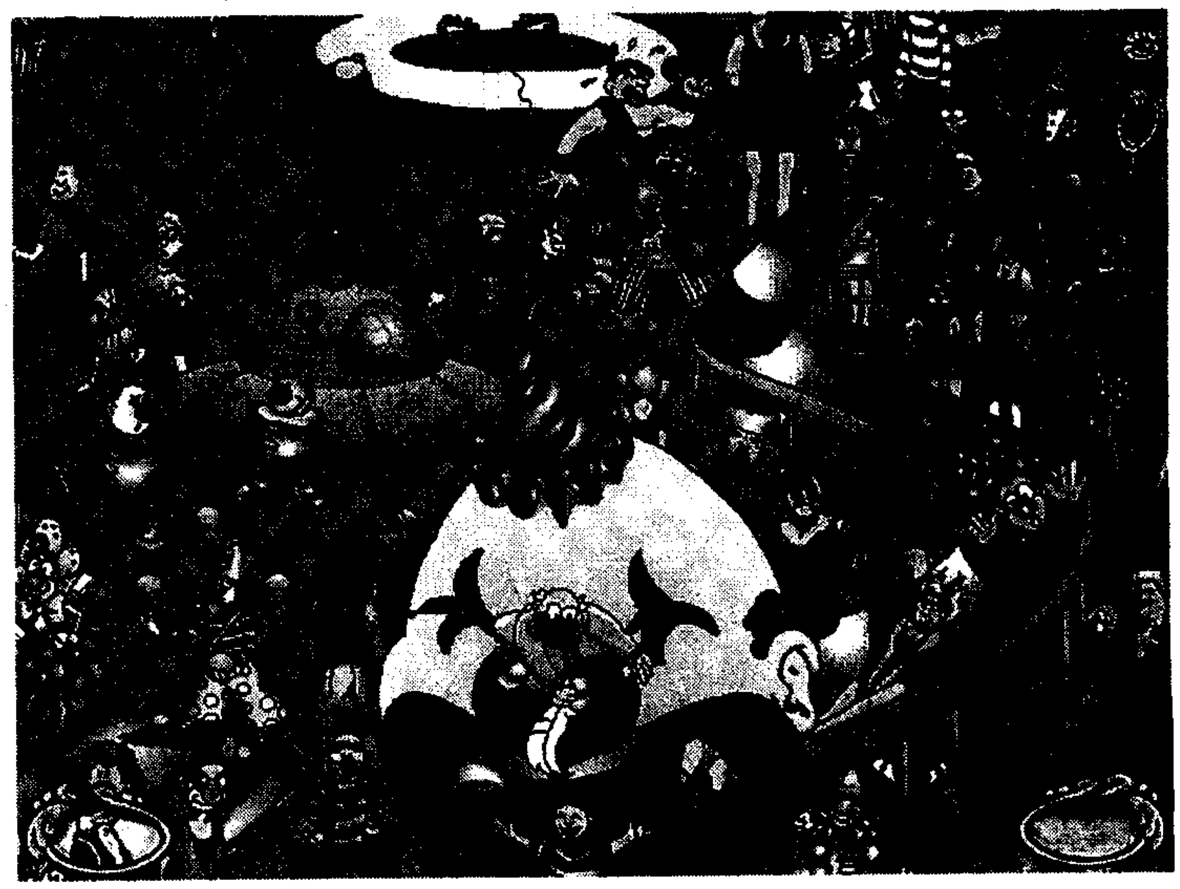
As a full-time practising Muslim resident in the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Alliance, I hereby pledge that I will not knowingly burn down any Christian church, or attempt to stone to death any vicar of the Church of England.

Signed .....



"You goin' soft, Hank?"

WHERE'S OZZIE? 2



Ozzie has moved his cave. Can YOU find him without killing everyone else in the picture?

health

Bin Laden – Has He Got Cancer?

By Our Medical Correspondent **Dr Thomas Utterfraud**

FROM the grainy pictures on Al-Jezira television, is it quite clear that Osama bin Laden has only three weeks to live. The first clue is his beard, which has lost its sheen. This is symptomatic of severe renal failure. The second clue is the disturbing colour of his skin which, even in black-and-white, is looking worryingly yellow, a clear sign of Hepatitis B, brought on by living in damp caves and having to survive on a diet of American food parcels. The final clue is a piece in the Telegraph saying that last June he was in hospital in Dubai where he was diagnosed as having liver problems.

TOMORROW: Dr Utterfraud asks "Am I A Psychotic? You Decide"

YES, IT'S THE NEW-LOOK DEMOCRATIC HOUSE OF LORDS

by Our Political Staff
Peter Riddellofthesarahsands

TONY BLAIR unveiled his plans to drag the House of Lords kicking and screaming into the 21st century.

OUT GO

- CENTURIES of reactionary privilege by backwoods land-owners obsessed with fox-hunting

IN COME

- A NEW wave of forward-looking meritocrats democratically chosen by Tony Blair

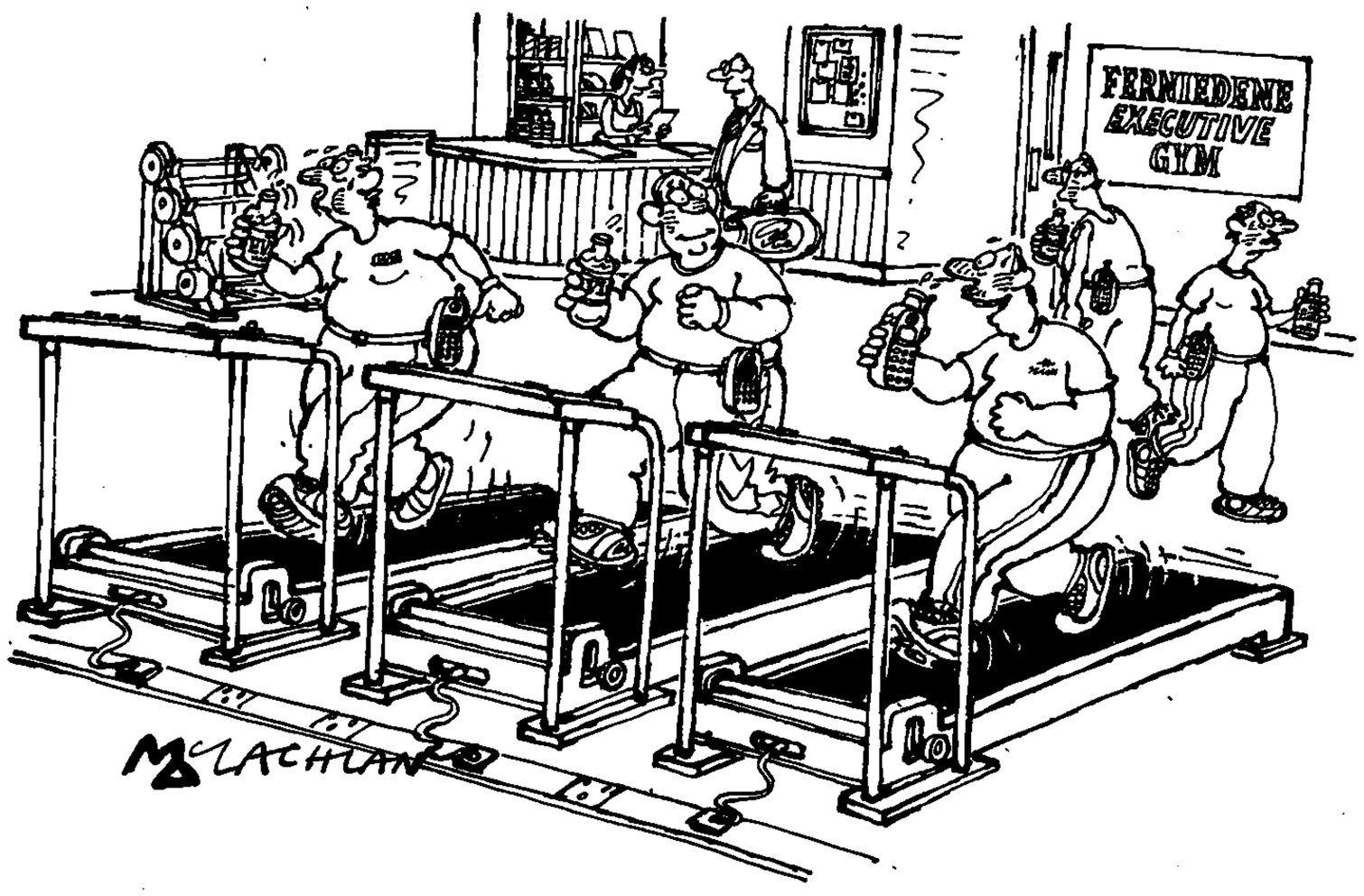
Sources close to Number Ten last night explained that there was no room in a truly modern Britain for peers who spend their time picking holes in the Government's legislation.

"The job of an efficient, streamlined, forward-looking second chamber is to support the prime minister in everything he does."

How The House Of Lords Will Be Chosen

- **60% will be appointed by the prime minister of the day** (Mr Blair)
- **20% will be appointed by an independent commission** (whose members will be chosen by Mr Blair)
- **20% will be elected from a list of candidates** (vetted as suitable for membership of the Lords by the independent commission appointed by Mr Blair)

Members of the House of Lords will no longer be known as "Lords". Instead they will be known as "Friends of Tony", to ensure that they can get a table in the Ivy whenever they want.



"It's the ultimate! A bottle of water and mobile phone combined"

IS IT THE END FOR BIG RON KNEE?

by **E.I. Erewego**, Our Man In The Carpark Listening To The Match On His Car Radio

THE WORLD of soccer was rocked to its foundations when Neasden FC last week clocked up a record run of 6719 games without a win.

A searing question mark now hangs over the head of the man who for 50 years has steered his team to the very depths of football achievement.

Shock

Even the fans (Sid and Doris Bonkers) who have given blind support to "Big Ron" Knee, Neasden's tight-lipped mastermind, are now openly thinking the unthinkable.

Said Sid: "We have had our glory days under Big Ron. But recent results have demoralised the squad and most of them have left to join other clubs.

"If they carry on like this, Neasden will be no more."

Another Shock

But last night Big Ron was defiant: "When I took over at the Bridge, the Squirrels had never won a game. Yet here we are over 50 years later and they still haven't won. It is just a blip."

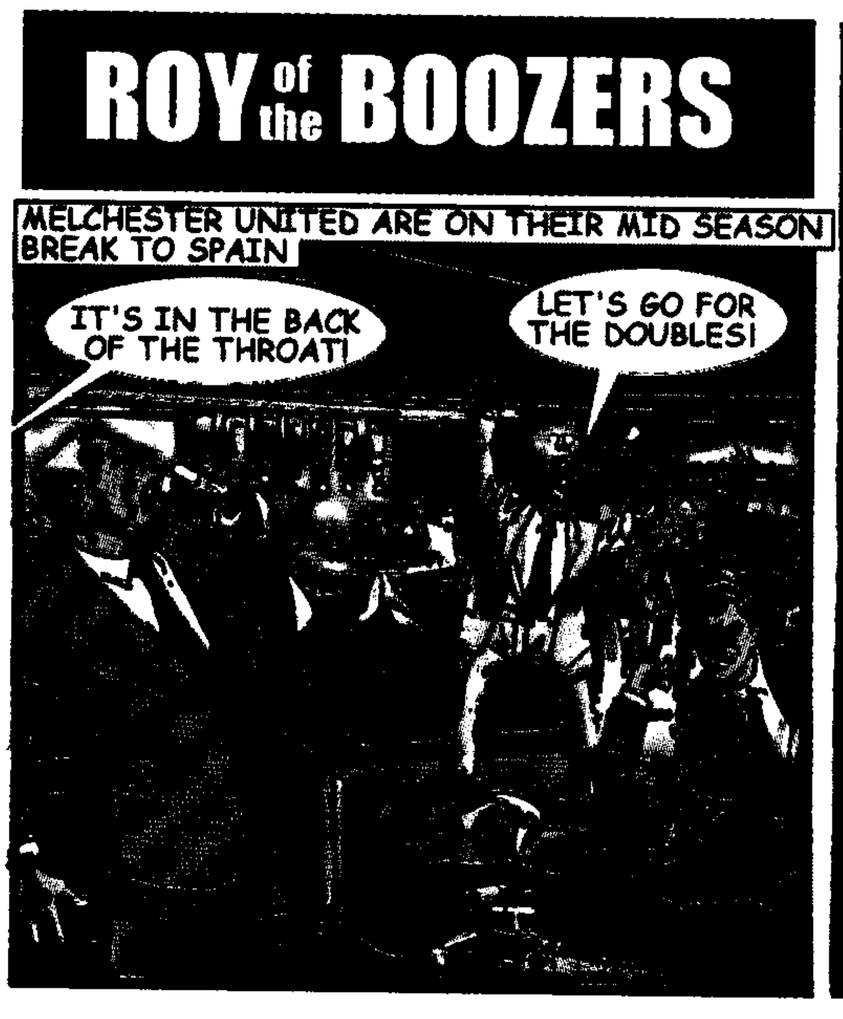
LATE SCORE

Sotheby's Relegation Trophy Charity Shield (1st Leg)

Taliban United 17
(Sebag-Montefiore 12, Pevsner [o.g.] 5)
Neasden 0

(Match abandoned due to anthrax attack)

ROY of the BOOZERS



RAILTRACK LATEST

'Railway' Rescue Package Criticised

NUMBER 10 was roundly criticised yesterday as it confirmed a rescue package for the failing minister in charge of Britain's railways, Stephen Byers.

"Despite Byers clearly being unable to read the signals that it's time for him to go," said one amazed commuter after Byers was derailed in the Commons by the Opposition, "the Government is continuing to pour good money after bad by allowing him to continue cashing his ministerial pay cheque every month.

"Byers needs to be replaced with a 'not for blunders' minister to restore confidence in our railways."

Stephen Byers is 19 (days away from being forced out)

Dispute Over Date Continues

THE DISPUTE over exactly when commuters realised that Railtrack needed to be wound up as it was interested only in profit, maintaining its shareholders' dividends and wasn't in any way fit to run Britain's railways, continued yesterday.

"Many of my fellow passengers, crowded like sardines into the 7.52 service to Waterloo, insisted it was after the Southall crash on the 19th September 1997," said one commuter, gasping for breath. "Whilst others spoke of the Ladbroke Grove crash on the 5th October 1999 and the Hatfield crash on the 17th October 2000.

"It's possible the exact date may never be known."

Wizards To Take Over Railways

THE GOVERNMENT has confirmed that the operators of the hugely successful and popular 'Hogwarts Express' have been chosen to take over the day-to-day running of Britain's railways from Railtrack.

"We've always said that the problems facing Britain's railways couldn't be solved by waving a magic wand, but how wrong we were," said a clearly delighted Stephen... *(cont'd. p. 94)*

(Reuters)

Det Sgt Doug Marshall, said inquiries will be carried out in the area.

He said: "Obviously it makes it that much more difficult for the police when crimes are reported after the event."

Evening Mail

THE SUNDAY TIMES • November 16, 2001

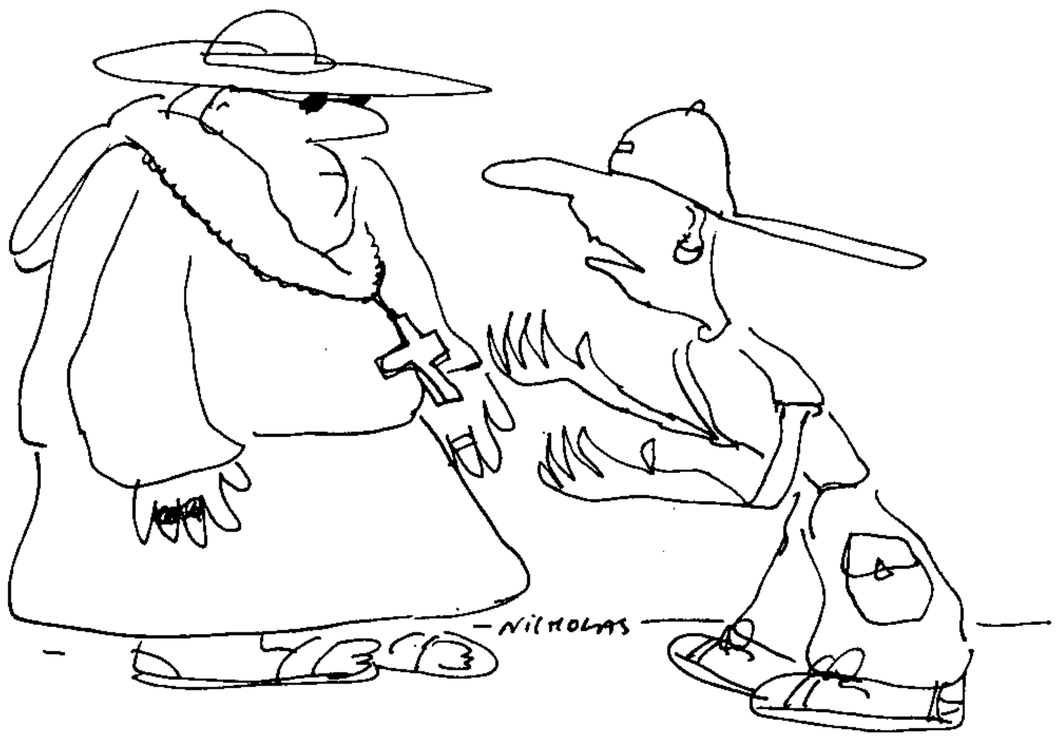
The End Of Celebrity

by A.A. Homestart

IT'S OFFICIAL! The cult of celebrity is over. In the wake of the events of the 11th September, there is no longer any public appetite for personality-based trivia about figures in the media. We have moved on from this childish obsession with fame and its trappings to a more responsible and sobre awareness of the gravity of real life.

INSIDE

- Big pictures of the celebrities we are no longer obsessed with **page 2**
- Interviews with Madonna, Britney and Kylie about their reaction to the end of celebrity **page 3**
- J.K. Rowling buys some knickers **pages 4-94**



"I want to take a vow of celebrity"

An Official Statement From His Highness the Lord High Mayor of London, His Worship Sir Red Kennington

Oyez! Oyez! Oyez! Hear ye!

It is with deep regret that the Mayor of London has to announce his formal separation from his long-time live-in partner, Ms Katherine of Allen. This sad step has only been arrived at after many months of serious reflection and discussion between the parties.

The key factor in this unfortunate but inevitable break-up has been the increasing divergence of lifestyles involving the two partners, and the growing pressure of work involved in their case-load of public responsibilities.

The people of London will be reassured to know that an amicable agreement has been reached between the parties as to the custody and future care and maintenance of the dependent newts. The Mayor will be the primary carer in respect of the newts (aged 3, 18 months and one floating around at the top of the tank not looking too well) and Ms Allen has been granted rights of acccess, which she has declined, owing to the fact that the presence of the amphibians in the household was deemed to be a contributory factor in the breakdown of the relationship.

Signed HRH the Red Ken,

Chief Residence of
His Worship the Mayor,
1536 Mugabe Avenue,
(formerly Lord Wolseley of
Khartoum Avenue Road),
Stoke Newtington.

POETRY CORNER

In Memoriam
Joe "Spud" Murphy, Irish inventor of the cheese-and-onion flavoured crisp

So. Farewell
Then.
Joe "Spud"
Murphy.
You invented the legendary
Cheese-and-Onion
Flavoured crisp.

"Oi'll have a pint of
Guinness
And a packet of those new
Cheese-and-Onion flavoured
Crisps, please, sor."

That was the catch-phrase
You taught to a whole
Generation
Of crisp eaters.

Since then, many other
Combinations of flavours
Have been
Introduced.
But yours remains
The most tasty.

E.J. Thribb (17½)

E.J. Thribb's latest verse-drama Salt In A Blue Bag is available on his website www.sofarewellthen.com

ME AND MY SPOON

THIS WEEK

NO. 94
DR GEORGE CAREY
Archbishop of Canterbury

Your Grace, what's your favourite type of spoon?

I think from a religious perspective I would have to say that all spoons are equally valid.

So you wouldn't put one spoon above another?

There's no single answer to the spoon question. Each spoon has its part to play, whether we are talking about the humble mustard spoon or the mighty spoon ladle.

I suppose at Lambeth Palace you've got some rather splendid spoons?

Yes, for instance, we've got a particularly fine collection of 15th century silver Flemish cabbage spoons, donated to Archbishop Wheatcroft by Henry VI.

But, as a churchman, how can you justify using such expensive spoons when millions of people in the world are starving?

It isn't as simple as that. We are only custodians of these spoons. In a sense we don't own anything. And even a spoon, if it is beautifully made, can be a form of worship.

Do you think the young people of today are interested in spoons?

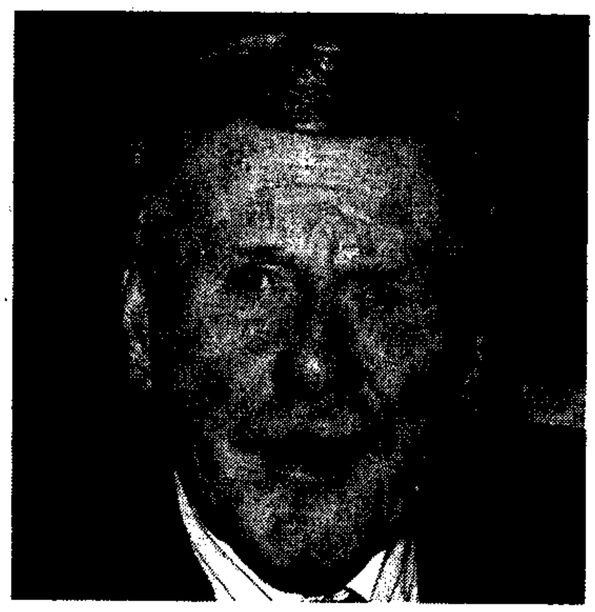
Oh indeed they are. As I go around the country, I am always meeting groups of young people who find that spoons play a very real part in their everyday lives.

Has anything amusing ever happened to you in connection with a spoon?

I knew you were going to ask me that and I'm sorry to disappoint you, but the answer is 'no'.

NEXT WEEK: Me and My Fire Extinguisher – Terence Stamp

DIARY



JIMMY YOUNG

Hello there! And a very warm welcome to the JY Col in your numero uno favorito magazinato! So what's he talking about, I *hear you ask* – what's Our Jimbo on about now? Good question, as you might say! Well, the answer is that I've been asked to write the diary for the Eye of Le Private fame, *would you believe*, so hold onto your horses everyone – both in this country and SUWER LE CONTINONG – and orft we jolly well go!

On a more serious note, I've never had a lot of time for so-called "satire". I may be sticking my neck out here – if you'll *pardonnez-moi my Français!* – but to me it lacks warmth. I can take it or leave it, to be honest – but I'd never turn down the chance to lend a bit of the old JY magic to a magazine down on its luck-luck-lucky-luck, to coin a phrase! But first, let's hear this, from your friend and mine – it's over to you, Mister Phil Collins!

Today, I had that highly controversial figure Mister Osama bin Laden on the line! *Now there's a name to conjure with!* Like him or loathe him, there's certainly no ignoring the fellow!

JY: And a very good JY morning to you, Osama!

O-b-L: Good morning, Jimmy.

JY: And a warm welcome to today's JY prog! Now, Osama, I know a lot of our listeners will be wondering how the weather is, out there in deepest Afghanistan?

O-b-L: Not too bad, thank you, Jimmy.

JY: Super! Now, "OSAMA" – there's a name to conjure with! Tell me, Osama, how *did* you come by a name like that?

O-b-L: My father he give it me, Jim, when I born.

JY: Lovely, now a number of our listeners have rung in with QUESTION-NEZ, for you, Osama – like Mr Geoffrey Bishop from Edgbaston, who says, "What I want to know, Jim, is how this character can justify swanning around the world, blowing places up, causing untold mayhem, and so on and so forth? Hasn't he got better things to do, Jim?" Over to you, Osama!

O-b-L: Thanks, Jimmy. Is the word of the Prophet. Is Holy War. Death to the Infidel.

JY: Fair enough, Osama! Can't argue with that! It takes all sorts – of that there's no denying! And we'll hear more from Osama – after this from Miss Sandy Shaw!

The second half of my interview with Osama brought out a warmer, softer side to a man who usually likes to keep it well hidden, for reasons of his *own-io*!

JY: ...And a Mrs Susan Worth from Orpington in Kent – lovely part of the country – has e-mailed us to say, "The one thing that gets on my wick, Jim, is that beard of his! What DOES he look like, Jim? I can't for the life of me think why he needs it that bushy! Has the chap never heard of a razor!?"

O-b-L: Is my religion, Jim.

JY: Super! And there's something that's puzzling Mr Arthur Wickham who lives up Shrewsbury way. Arthur says, "I don't like the sound of this Taliban lot at all, Jim. They've simply got no business setting off their bombs. They may like living in caves, but the rest of us like our creature comforts. Perhaps you'd ask your guest, Jim, to put that in his pipe and smoke it." Well, point taken, Arthur, and an awful lot of our listeners have raised that point about your cave, Osama. It must get dreadfully chilly as the nights draw in, doesn't it? Time to get our old friend Mr Blow the Blow-Heater out, *nessy-pas*?

O-b-L: My cave is my –

JY: – Sorry, Osama, going to have to cut you off there! Best of luck for the future! And now it's Cliff Richard (now there's a name to conjure with!) to take us up to Newstime, after which we have our Consumer Expert, Barry, asking the *questionne* on everyone's lips: "Toilet Ducks – Just How Effective Really Are They?", not to *mentionez* our regular all-round cookery expert Roger telling us how to get the most out of Sausage Appreciation Week...

There's frankly been a lot of nonsense written these past few weeks on the "JY To Hang Up His Headphones" front. They say there've been whispers from On High that I've grown a bit long in the tooth. Take it from Jimbo, nothing could be further from the truth! It's speculation I first heard, ooh, years ago. I'd just finished chatting to our then Medical Correspondent, the lovely Florence Nightingale *(now there's a name to conjure with!)* on tips for how to cope with whooping cough when I look in the Illustrated London News and what do I see but talk of my *impending retire-mioso*!

My trick for survival? Keep it tip-top-topical! We've had them all on the show – Charlie Chaplin, George Formby, Mr Gladstone, Lord Kitchener, King George V and his lovely wife Queen Mary, Martin Boorman, Tommy Steele, Dorothy L. Sayers, Marie Curie, Rudolf Valentino, Rudyard Kipling, Mrs Beeton and, more recently, Sir Anthony Eden. I think they've all been attracted by my courteous, easy-going style. I'd hate to single any of them out for praise – frankly, once you've met one, you've met 'em all – but my personal favourite would have to be Chairman Mao Tse-Tung – now there's a name to conjure with!

I'll never forget it. What an extraordinary character he turned out to be, full of the most tremendous stories of purging his enemies not to mention a truly great ability to laugh at himself! We slotted him in between Petula Clark and something very pleasant from the Brotherhood of Man.

JY: Mrs Katherine Haines from Teddington – lovely part of the country – has just called in to say she's not best pleased with your Cultural Revolution. "So what's all this Cultural Revolution nonsense, Jim?" says Kathy, "Sounds like more of your common-or-garden *Chinese mumbo-jumbo* to me! It's high time those politicians climbed off their high horses!" What say you to Mrs H, then, Chairman M? Sorry, I'll have to stop you there, to hear this, the latest Numero Uno from The New Seekers, and so *orft we jolly well go*. TTFN! TTFE!

As told to

CRAIG BROWN

Celeb

LIGGER

THE EVENTS OF SEPTEMBER 11TH HAVE TOTALLY CHANGED THE WORLD WE LIVE IN...
TELLING ME, DEBS..
READING THE PAPERS REALLY MAKES YOU PUT YOUR PERSONAL AND DOMESTIC LIFE IN PERSPECTIVE..
YEAH...
AT TIMES LIKE THIS WE'VE JUST GOT TO STICK TOGETHER.
THERE'S NO POINT IN HAVING ANOTHER MARITAL BUST UP. THE PRESS AREN'T INTERESTED IN STORIES LIKE THAT ANYMORE...
I HATE THIS WAR.

Literary Review

The spouting life

Burchill on Beckham

Julie Burchill

(Yellow Jersey, £10)

In which two hitherto unappeasable forces in modern cultural life — professional football and personality journalism — collide head-on.

IS IT really a quarter of a century since Miss Julie Burchill — Miss B, Julie — first crashed on to the stage of public life in her Mark I incarnation as one of the *New Musical Express's* (I am quoting from the original ad) "hip young gunslingers"? Ah, we were all a great deal younger then. I was but a callow teenager furrowing my brow over the *NME*'s inky pages — the print came off on your hands and stuck there like boot-polish — in the depths of the school sixth-form club and wondering what on earth this excitable young woman was on about. Thankfully, time hasn't dulled Miss Burchill's asperities or her capacity for good honest fun.

It is an axiom, of course, that presented with an artefact, or a phenomenon, or even an abstract noun, the average high-grade journo doesn't see the thing itself: he — increasingly she — sees something else altogether. Set Mr Will Self down in front of a drug-addict and he sees a shamanistic avatar of the rituals of intoxication. Show one of the young gentlemen who review fiction for the posh Sundays a novel written in Glasgow patois ("So ah tellt him ah was radge", etc) and he sees a vibrant celebration of urban demotic.

Show Miss B a picture of David Beckham and she sees, well, some front-running phrases might be "working-class culture", "the new Britain", "the Princess of Wales" and "sexual identity". Do they have anything to do with this silent and unassuming young man and his pop star wife, here crawled over to the extent of at least 120 small-scale pages? Not really. But this is Julie Burchill, you see, and if you wander into a restaurant called The Star of India, well you expect to get curry don't you?

He is a footballer. She sings songs and may or may not (no one seems very clear about this) be a member of the Spice Girls. They have an infant son named Brooklyn, a pot of money which they diligently spend, and seem to rather like each other. But clearly this won't do at all. So, courtesy of Miss Burchill's high-octane prose, we learn that he has "bypassed the Crisis of Masculinity" while displaying "Diana-faced gravitas". The one "seems so aristocratic" while the other is "so delightfully common" (no prizes for guessing which one). Together they have sidestepped the problem of contemporary celebrity, while provoking widespread resentment. Staring at this star-spangled alliance of wealth, beauty and charm "we are forced to face our own busted dreams, and it hurts".

Are we? Does it? If pressed, one might just be wondering at this point whether the Beckhams are really quite interesting enough to merit the newspaper squalling and the celebrity profiles and if there are other topics rather more deserving of attention. Relax, though, there's a great deal more to the Burchill thesis than this — loads of stuff about soccer's, hem-hem, homo-erotic tendencies (one of Julie's favourite subjects) the decline of a certain kind of working-class English life (another of Julie's favourite subjects) and the class-based snootiness that still infects our officially meritocratic Blairite Britain. The problem, as so often with what issues from Miss Burchill's fervent pen, is that it's not really about the subject in hand but about, well, Miss Burchill herself.

By far the most revealing, and entertaining, passages in *Burchill on Beckham* are the look-backs on early life — the fondly remembered '70s lad culture of blokey footballers and dodgy pop Lotharios, her old dad who hated nancy boys but never minded taking his Julie to see the Bolshoi Ballet. What we have here, in fact, shorn of its researches among the newspaper files and the more outrageous bits of theorising, is just another disguised autobiography, or rather the spectacle of somebody unloading her own, let us call them, idiosyncratic fixations on a couple of more or less innocent bystanders. And while there is a certain amount to amuse and instruct, if not alas in quite the way Miss B intended, it's a bit rich of Julie, and her publisher, to pretend that what ended up on the shelves is a book about sport.

Books & Bookmen

■ WHEN Andrew Rosenheim left as MD of Penguin Press, he said the move was "amicable" and prompted by his desire for change. No mention of the fact that Penguin General's new MD Helen Fraser had been deeply unimpressed with the way he had run the imprint at a loss.

Another reason for his exit might have been his lack of popularity with all but a small male coterie of his staff, due to his bullying manner. When it came to the great man's leaving collection, the sum total came to around £4.30, a couple of bottle tops and some old foreign coins with holes in them. Certainly not enough to buy a leaving present befitting a senior exec.

Fogeyish editor Stuart Proffitt — head of the Rosenheim coterie — decided the funds might just run to a fishing hat, with Proffitt himself making up the shortfall.

Naturally Proffitt — who eschews the modern office furniture of Shell-Mex House in favour of an antique mahogany desk — sees himself as Rosenheim's natural successor and will be lobbying hard for the job, along with his peers Simon Winder and Nigel Wilcockson. Unfortunately, his succession is likely to be looked upon dimly by Fraser. The grand projects he acquires at vastly-inflated prices are renowned for failing to live up to his name, and his lavish entertainment budget does the bottom line no favours either.

■ LAST MONTH when high court judge Mr Justice Laddie rejected former Tory MP Rupert Allason's case against Random House disputing authorship of alleged "Fifth Man" John Cairncross's autobiography *The Enigma Spy*, he described Allason as "a profoundly dishonest man".

Initially enlisted as Cairncross's collaborator, Allason had been sacked from the project. The book later appeared under Cairncross's name, and Allason claimed he had done at least 50 percent of the work, for which he had not been paid.

Analysis of Cairncross's papers showed, however, that 95 percent of the finished manuscript was compiled largely from work done before Allason came on board. Laddie said he had come to the "clearest possible conclusion that Mr Allason has told me untruth after untruth in pursuit of this claim".

However, the late Cairncross himself was no stranger to untruths,

"Harry Potter, Harry Potter, Harry Potter Harry Harry!"

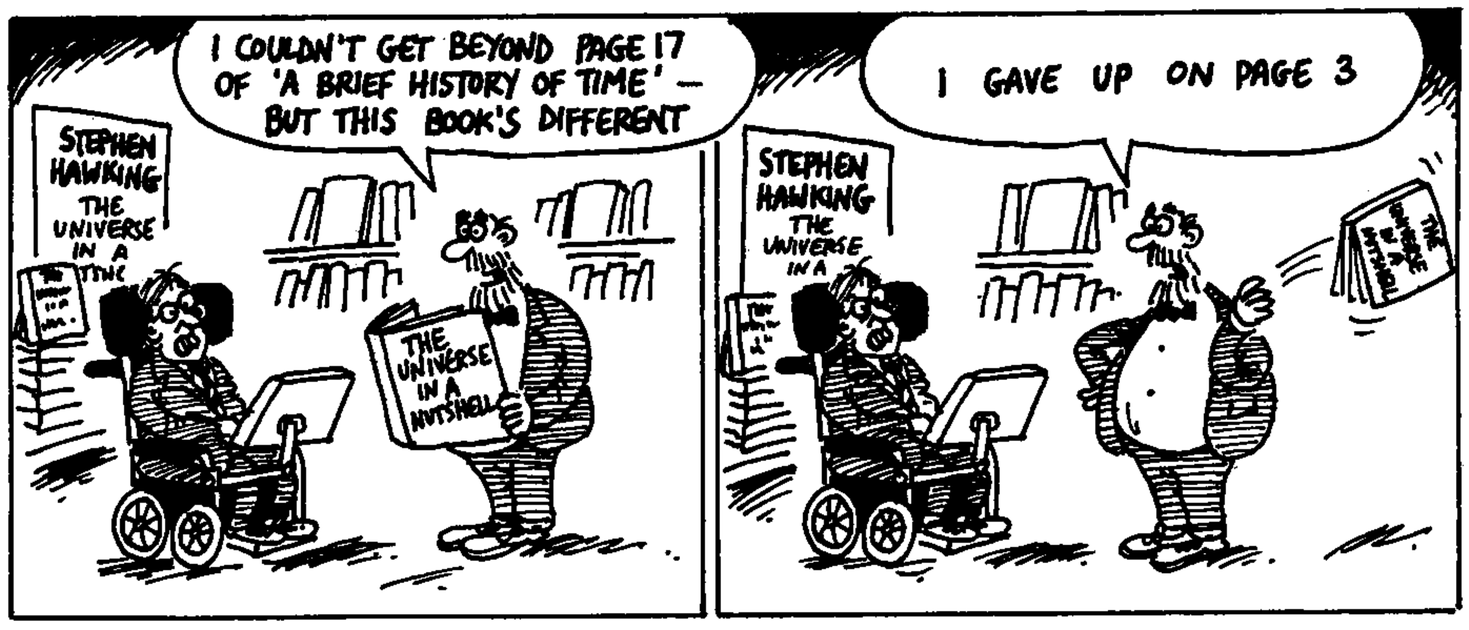
it would appear. The whole book is an attempt to clear his name, and one which doesn't ring true among seasoned spook-watchers. One reviewer, the agent and author Andrew Lownie — writing in the *Tablet* at the time of the book's publication in 1997 — observed that "as Cairncross tells it, he was a much-maligned man, caught up in a world he never fully understood... sacrificed... to deflect attention from the real British traitor, Roger Hollis, director-general of MI5 and an Oxford man."

Lownie goes onto challenge this self-justfying view. "The truth is rather different. Certainly his statements can be verified and in almost every case they are found wanting. John Cairncross was one of the most important of the Cambridge spies recruited during the 1930s, an opening batsman rather than a number five." The reviewer concludes by dismissing the whole book as "fiction masquerading as fact" and calling for its withdrawal. Unfortunately, Random House has now used the £200,000 Allason judgment as an all-clear to restore this curious and discredited book to the nation's stores with the added benefit of the free publicity generated by the case.

■ ALAN TAYLOR, resident literateur at Scotland's Sunday Herald, gives short shrift to Will Self's new collection, Feeding Frenzy, dismissing the author as a "hack" and a "whore" who refuses to "engage in serious debate" and takes refuge in "soft journalism" such as TV reviews.

Fair enough. But can this high-minded reviewer by any chance be the same Alan Taylor who writes a mind-numbingly "soft" diary in the *Herald* every week – and who in the very same issue produced a lengthy feature on the joy of quiz shows?

'Bookworm'


I COULDN'T GET BEYOND PAGE 17 OF 'A BRIEF HISTORY OF TIME' — BUT THIS BOOK'S DIFFERENT
STEPHEN HAWKING THE UNIVERSE IN A NUTSHELL
I GAVE UP ON PAGE 3
STEPHEN HAWKING THE UNIVERSE IN A

IN THE BACK

ISRAELI EMBASSY BOMBING APPEAL

WISE AFTER THE EVENT

IDEALISTS in the criminal law can be heard to claim that the court of appeal, with its humanitarians like vice-president Lord Justice Rose and Mr Justice Hooper, has progressed a long way from the days of their notorious predecessors like lord justices Lane, Russell and O'Connor. Such idealism has now been swept aside with the judgment on 1 November of Rose, Hooper and Goldring in the case of Jawad Botmeh and Samar Alami.

These young Palestinians were convicted in 1996 of conspiracy two years earlier to bomb the Israeli embassy in central London and a building in Finchley associated with the Zionist Federation. The two were arrested after Botmeh was traced as one of the men who bought the Audi car that bombed the embassy. Both admitted experimenting with chemicals and explosives. Their madcap aim was to fly the explosives by remote control aeroplane to the occupied territories on the West bankof Jordan.

The *Eye* of 17 April 1998 (948) was the first British publication to challenge the conviction, pointing to a number of gaps in the prosecution case, chief among which were the cast-iron alibis of both defendants at the time of the bombings, the acquittal of two co-defendants and the fact that the chemicals with which the couple had experimented were of a quite different order to those used in the bombings. The evidence, the *Eye* suggested, pointed to far more sophisticated culprits.

Suspicions that a quite different and more professional group had carried out the bombings were reinforced in 1997 when David Shayler, who had defected from MI5, told the *Mail on Sunday* that he had heard from an impeccable MI5 source of a warning issued to British intelligence shortly before the bombings that Israeli targets in London would be attacked. If there was such a warning, it would have cast serious doubt on the guilt of the two Palestinians.

Shayler's revelations must also have come as a shock to Det Supt William Emerton, the officer in charge of the investigation into the bombings. Cross-examined at the original trial on 4 November 1996 by Helena Kennedy QC (whose client was acquitted), Mr Emerton said: "I have asked the security services whether they are aware of anybody from any source; and one of the big things about this investigation, frankly, is the intelligence vacuum that surrounds it. There was nobody anywhere in the world who can give any indication of any clue about anybody doing anything. This is a straightforward police investigation."

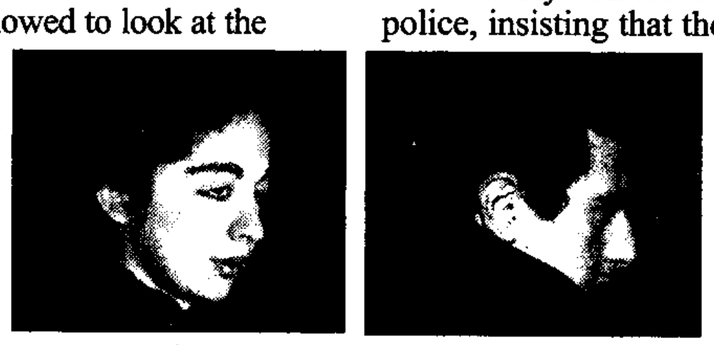
It was this "intelligence vacuum" that helped persuade the jury that these bombings were the work of a small amateurish group operating in London. But here, according to Shayler, was a senior MI5 officer saying there was a warning from one of their standard sources.

The first reaction of the authorities to Shayler's revelation was to discredit it. Foreign secretary Robin Cook described Shayler as a "fantasist". Countless inquiries by Gareth Peirce, the Palestinians' solicitor, failed to produce anything from the prosecution or the security services to confirm or deny Shayler's assertion. Then, as the two young people started their appeal a year ago, the security services suddenly revealed, in a hurried and garbled statement, that Shayler had been perfectly correct: there had indeed been a warning about an attack on Israeli targets in London from a terrorist organisation that had nothing to do with Samar or Jawad.

Why had no one heard any of this before? The answer was "human error" or, to put it another way, gross incompetence of a type that is hard to credit even from MI5. The statement, grudgingly conceded to Jawad and Samar's lawyers a year ago, explained that the warning had been "disseminated" by a document within the security service but "for reasons of human error" not put into the files which were shown to prosecution counsel in the Jawad/Alami case.

Two other relevant documents were shown to the prosecution but not the defence. One of those documents referred to the Israeli embassy bombing but was not even shown to the judge. The warning document also went to MI6, one of whose officers was responsible for disclosure in the Botmeh-Alami case, yet the document was not disclosed. There were seven cases of "human error". As a result, not a word of the warning got to the court in the original trial. In some embarrassment the appeal was adjourned. All the documents about the warning had been served with a PII (public interest immunity) order so they could not be disclosed in open court.

The judges asked defence counsel Michael Mansfield QC "if he were allowed to look at the matter in relation to which public interest immunity was claimed, he would be willing to give an undertaking not to disclose its contents to his clients". Mansfield refused, for obvious reasons. So the judges and the prosecution "proceeded to examine the matter ex parte (with no one else present)". After their secret meeting, the judges declared themselves "entirely satisfied" that public interest immunity had been "rightly claimed in relation to the matter which we have seen, because it affects national security at the highest level and would, if disclosed, present a clear and immediate threat to life."



20 years: Samar Alami and Jawad Botmeh

The undisclosed information, they announced without proof (since the proof could not be disclosed), "would have had no impact on the trial". As to the "human error" explanations for the MI5 bungling, "we do not take the view that deliberate malpractice is a necessary or proper inference from repeated human error".

One remarkable aspect of the case that appears to have eluded the appeal judges is the coincidence of more than one set of people seeking to attack the Israeli embassy in London shortly before the embassy was in fact attacked. Further crucial evidence on this point was a statement that emerged a year ago from a television producer called Tim Wise.

Quite by accident the defence heard that shortly before the embassy was bombed Wise had gone to Fulham police station with maps and documents he had found in a room he had let to a colleague. The colleague's name was Issa El Ali, but has since been changed to Corleone. Wise had gone to Croatia with El Ali, who was then claiming to be a journalist and a Muslim activist. He ran off with Wise's camera. The documents and maps found in El Ali's rooms seemed suspicious to Wise, and on 13 July 1994 he handed them in to Fulham police station. Two weeks later the embassy was bombed.

Fulham police agreed with Wise that the documents were "terrorist-related" and called in Scotland Yard's anti-terrorist branch. Sgt Stephen Thomas from that branch recommended "no action" on the grounds a) that El Ali was known to Special Branch and b) that the map (only one map was mentioned) handed in by Wise was of a building in Finchley relevant to El Ali's claimed security work. A list of arms and weapons found in El Ali's flat with the maps and handed in by Wise was dismissed by Sgt Thomas as obviously connected with El Ali's relief work in Bosnia on behalf of the British Muslim parliament.

Sgt Thomas, incidentally, was the anti-terrorist officer who deduced that a map found in the home of Samar Alami described the area bombed at Finchley. In an embarrassing sequence at the trial, the map was proved to describe the Lebanese town of Sidon.

Before the trial in 1996 the defence was informed of Sgt Thomas's message about the Wise story, and dismissed the whole tale as irrelevant, as he had done. After this story came to light last year, Mr Wise was contacted in Australia. He immediately contested the account given by the police, insisting that there was more than one map, and another, which was hand-drawn, definitely portrayed the Israeli embassy. Wise flew from Australia to give evidence at the appeal. If he had been called, the prosecution said they would call El Ali. The defence had also interviewed Dr Siddiqui, of the British Muslim parliament, who contemptuously dismissed El Ali's story about his work for the parliament. But the judges refused even to hear Wise, El Ali or Siddiqui. El Ali, as it turned out, would probably not have been available anyway since the day before he was due to give evidence he admitted himself to the casualty department of a London hospital, complaining of anxiety and depression.

The judges insisted that the defence had heard of the story of El Ali in 1996, and ignored it. They did not even comment on the way the defence was misled by the anti-terrorist branch description of the documents handed in by Wise as a single ordnance survey map of a house in north London, and not, as Wise insisted, of several other documents including a hand-drawn map of the Israeli embassy. They had not a word of criticism for the way in which all the documents mysteriously vanished without trace from the property department of Fulham police station.

They did not even address the striking coincidence that soon after MI5 was warned of attacks on Israeli property in London, and soon after documents were handed in to Fulham police station suggesting still more terrorist-related interest in the Israeli embassy, the bombs went off – and two young Palestinians entirely unrelated either to the warning to MI5 or to El Ali were later found guilty of conspiring to bomb the embassy. Wise was refused access to the court. The appeals were dismissed. Neither Lane, Russell, O'Connor nor any of the judges responsible for the serial miscarriages of the late 1980s and early 1990s could have improved on such a judicial shambles.

HOW PFI WORKS

THE merger of three hospitals in and around Halifax and the exciting new proposals to replace them with a new hospital built by a private finance initiative (PFI) scheme in partnership with a private consortium called Catalyst was scheduled to save public money. It hasn't.

In the first six months after the new hospital opened, the Calderdale and Huddersfield Trust announced a £15m loss — a loss now miraculously reduced to £4m after what can only have been a massive hand-out from the NHS.

In a "commentary" on the losses to 30 September, finance officer Dawn Stephenson refers again and again to the problems of PFI. One main reason for the losses is "overspend due to additions to the build and oversights in the PFI contract" (no figures revealed). But the dramatic effects of PFI have shown up in a number of other ways.

The number of people waiting for treatment is up from 275 in the bad old days of the old hospitals to 975 at the brand new one. As for the £4m deficit, the trust confesses that it is "unlikely" to be slimmed down "without further support from the local health economy". The local health economy means public money, not private.

MMR: NOW GET READY FOR THE QUADRUPLE JAB

DR David Salisbury, head of immunisation at the department of health, has confirmed that the government is considering introducing a new chicken pox vaccine. One option is to combine the new shot with the controversial triple MMR jab.

Much to the dismay of parents who believe their children have been damaged by MMR and who want more research into their children's conditions, a trial of the quadruple jab involving 200 children is already under way in Sheffield.

Last week the government also introduced another triple jab, combining a new whooping cough booster for pre-school four year olds with the existing diptheria and tetanus injection, to be called DTaP. Pre-school vaccines are now one triple DtaP injection, one triple MMR shot and polio drops. Yet this increase in administering multi-doses of vaccines into immature bodies comes at a time when there is increasing concern about their potential combined effects.

This week the US Institute of Medicine immunisation safety review is looking at "multiple immunisation and immune system dysfunction", specifically examining two areas of concern. Does the number of vaccines administered "overload" the capacity of the infant's immature immune system, perhaps impairing immunity to other infections or altering the body's tolerance to self-antigens, thereby contributing to a greater risk for allergic or auto-immune disease? And is there a relationship between any of these proposed outcomes and the number, the route of administration, or the nature of the vaccines and vaccine antigens?

By the time they have reached five, children in the UK will have received no fewer than 25 vaccines – 15 of these given in the first five months of life. This compares to a total of 16 being given in 1988 (with only eight before five months) and before the introduction of MMR.

Lawyers and families involved in the two multi-million pound legal actions against the pharmaceutical companies now underway in both the US and the UK, maintain the increase in vaccine and increase in auto-immune disease, like autism, is no coincidence and that the answer to both the IOM questions is: yes.

Of course they have yet to prove their case. But should the government be careering down the multi-vaccine road until it has definitive answers? David Salisbury at the department of health clearly believes so, recently dismissing concerns thus: "There remains no study that identifies evidence of a link between MMR and autism. And I hope that soon, some of the silliness about MMR will have gone."

Er... except that one of the latest studies published in the journal *Adverse Drug Reactions* suggests all the vaccine safety tests for the triple jab – and the more recent studies looking for possible links – are useless because not one of them followed up any children for more than a few weeks.

Prof Walter Spitzer, a professor of epidemiology in Canada, and Scottish child psychiatrist Ken Aitken found that children who developed autism after receiving the jab were diagnosed on average about *two and a half years* after the jab. Therefore, the authors argued, it was "grossly inappropriate to argue that there is no connection if post jab follow-up only lasted about six weeks".

"The findings reported here warrant repeating prospective and historical safety studies or undertaking them for the first time, in most countries. Such studies should be planned with adequate length of follow-up – ie at least three years."

That has not happened with this month's introduction of the latest whooping cough booster – a disease said to cause about nine deaths a year, despite high vaccine uptake of about 95 percent. It was introduced after a DoH-funded study at the Public Health Laboratory Se rvice looked at its administration along with MMR and "identified no safety concerns". The follow-up was for only six weeks.

A department of health spokesman said the UK had one of the largest and most successful immunisations programmes. "If there are vaccines being looked at and coming on to the market, which will protect people against disease or even death, we would be criticised if we ignore it," he said.

Next issue: MMR – the experts answer back.

FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS... FOLLOW-UPS...

● **CAFCASS:** A mole hunter has been seconded from the lord chancellor's department to catch the person who has been leaking information about the sorry state of the Children and Family Court Advisory Service (see *Eyes passim*).

Lord chancellor Lord Irvine might be better advised though to sort out the troubled agency's on-going crisis instead. Diane Shepherd, its chief executive, has gone on long term sick. Four more managers of the children's guardians have left the service, bringing the total of defectors to 24 out of 52. MPs have now started asking difficult questions; and an early-day motion expressing "extreme concern" about Cafcass has called for an "urgent and fundamental review of the service".

Quizzed this month by the home affairs select committee about Carcass, Lord Irvine agreed there were "problems with the quality of management". But disgruntled staff at headquarters suggest the faults lie closer to his department. After all, Carcass was hurried into existence in April without adequate funding or preparation thanks to Irvine's office. He has now assured the home affairs committee that he is "very much" on the case. So that's all right, then.

● **SOUTH AFRICAN ASBESTOS:** Property and construction group Montpelier's take–over as major shareholder of Cape plc appears to be good news for the thousands of South Africans who are sick and dying from asbestos poisoning in Cape's filthy mines and factories (see *Eyes passim*).

Days after Montpelier took over management of Cape, the company finally agreed to "engage in constructive dialogue" to settle the workers' claims for the dreadful asbestos-related cancers and lung diseases from which they now suffer. They have 14 days before they report their progress to the high court.

Lawyers acting for the workers and their families are seeking a total of £25m. *Eye* readers will recall how Cape has been putting aside millions of pounds a year — not to compensate the South Africans but to fight their claims tooth and nail through the courts (having settled similar claims from its former British employees who enjoyed arguably safer conditions than their South African counterparts).

It has taken five years to bring Cape to the negotiating table, in which time several hundred asbestos victims have died. In fact, since Cape's last AGM in May this year, 150 claimants have died: an average of one a day.

THE PITY OF PORTLAND

MINUTES before he fashioned a noose and hanged himself from his prison cell bars, Colin Williamson wrote a letter to his mother and his girlfriend. "I am so sorry," he said. "I feel like I am going mad in the head."

Colin Williamson was 18 years old. His father was a violent alcoholic and a gambler who regularly used his mother as a punch bag. Colin had learning difficulties, suffered bullying and isolation at school and by the time he was 14 he was being used as a lookout and runner for local drug dealers. By 16 he was, perhaps not surprisingly, himself hooked on heroin and crack cocaine.

He financed his serious addiction and spiralling debts to dealers by theft and robbery. In May this year he was sentenced to five years for robbery, attempted robbery and possession of an offensive weapon.

Sent to Portland young offenders' institute in Dorset, Colin was diagnosed as suffering from chronic depression and was prescribed anti-depressants and pills for anxiety. He repeatedly complained of hearing voices in his head which told him to kill himself; but although there appears to be a history of schizophrenia in his family, psychiatrists at the jail ruled it out. "These were his own thoughts churning around and not auditory hallucinations with schizophrenic illness," recorded one.

Whatever their origin, on 3 June – and only an hour after speaking to his girlfriend of their wedding plans – the voices seem to have won. Last week, after hearing of his sad short life, an inquest jury returned a verdict of suicide on Colin.

The death of yet another young man (16 so far this year) who was a known suicide risk with a history of mental illness provides another damning indictment of the prison and criminal justice system's inability to deal with vulnerable young people.

On arrival at Portland, Colin was deemed a suicide risk and put under a special self-harm regime. Except that Portland seemed to forget one of the most crucial aspects of suicide risk: instead of being put in shared accommodation, throughout his short detention in Portland Colin was in a cell on his own. On the day he died he was in a cell with two bunk beds and the other was empty.

Further, only three days before he died, a prison officer — without reference to any doctor, psychiatrist or medical staff — decided to take Colin off special suicide scrutiny. A Prison Service internal inquiry report concluded that even if medical opinion had been sought and had Colin stayed on the suicide scheme, it is "unlikely" his death would have been prevented. His consultant psychiatrist, however, maintained Colin would have been much more likely to have survived if he was in a shared cell.

Last week the *Eye* reported on two other young prisoners who killed themselves – one aged only 16. They, like Colin, were suffering mental illness and were known suicide risks. Like Colin, they too were placed in cells on their own and hanged themselves.

Colin's mother Norma Woods is to launch the first action against the Prison Service under new human rights legislation which places a duty on the state to safeguard the lives of those in custody.

In the City

BARCLAYS shareholders have paid a high price for the bank's failure to agree to voluntary redundancy for £50,000-a-year encryption expert Graham Browne, acquitted last week by an Old Bailey jury of trying to blackmail the bank for £25m.

Barclays ran up substantial legal fees in a failed bid to have Browne tried at least in part in secret to prevent weaknesses in its credit card security becoming public. The high street bank also failed in efforts to influence the prosecution of Browne to minimise embarrassment over his claims.

Evidence at the trial confirmed much of what Browne claimed – one reason perhaps the jury found him not guilty and accepted his defence that he had acted "stupidly" in seeking to bring security problems to the bank's attention by his "ludicrous" demand.

The evidence about how customers' financial details are guarded was hardly reassuring for the millions of Barclaycard customers or those with MasterCard and Visa cards from Barclays. Prosecutor Sallie Bennett-Jenkins said of what Browne knew: "If any of this information were to be made public the security of the bank's entire debit and credit organisation would be in jeopardy."

Witnesses confirmed that the small four-strong encryption team that Browne led was under-resourced, under-staffed and over-worked over a long period. At one time Browne had been the only encryption expert. During the 90s he had repeatedly written to his superiors pointing out "security problems". These, he claimed, were constantly ignored.

After he was refused voluntary redundancy Browne, 57, resigned, believing that his resignation would not be accepted. When it was and he lost a job he clearly loved, he became bitter and frustrated. One of his colleagues blamed Barclays for taking an "aggressive" approach to Browne, who had worked for the bank since 1985.

An anonymous letter to the *Eye*, received after the magazine had revealed Barclays involvement and the secrecy surrounding the prosecution, and said to be from Browne's supportive colleagues at Barclays' Radbroke Hall computer centre in Cheshire, accused the bank of bullying tactics.

One of the four claimed blackmail letters written by Browne to Barclays chief executive Matt Barratt, using the alias of his original name – whatever his skills with codes, the ex-Barclays executive was no whiz at criminality – stated Barclays' real fear: "Your security needs sorting out. It would not do for the public to know how bad it is." As Browne told the City police when he was interviewed: "Sooner or later there will be an almighty cock-up."

Browne maintained that there were and still are "fundamental flaws" in Barclays' card security system. The bank admitted it had scrapped an internal project, on which Browne worked, called Operation Warthog to seal up the cracks. What Barclays has done since to solve the problems was unclear from the trial evidence.

Some of Browne's criticisms of Barclays' card security operation were confirmed by his colleagues and even by the bank's own witnesses. Senior risk assessment executive David Curd admitted when questioned by defence counsel Nicholas Atkinson: "We have identified weaknesses in our procedures." He accepted that the credit cards had been "at risk".

It was perhaps not surprising therefore that Barclays was slow to call in the police in the opinion of those with knowledge of investigating extortion. Despite realising that the threat to reveal the top secret codes and keys was of the "utmost seriousness", creating the risk of "serious counterfeiting", the police were not alerted until the arrival of the fourth letter, six months after the initial communication. What seems to have triggered this action was the threat to issue a press release broadcasting the security concerns.

"He's something in the City – the something is redundant"

Until then the search for the "blackmailer" and the attempt to assess the security risk had been conducted internally and in secret – at "significant" cost in manpower and resources – without any success. Indeed at one time Barclays paid for a meeting with Browne to discuss security problems four months after he resigned in a huff and two months after the first demand for money.

Browne was identified within 10 days by City police detectives as the likely author of the letters and arrested. He eventually confessed to writing the letters saying that the £25m demand – £1.785m each to be paid to himself and 13 others to form a team to deal with the problems – had been a joke which he had not expected the bank to take seriously. One of his former colleagues saw it more as a "cry for help". Perhaps from a man more sad than bad.

Having found its "blackmailer" Barclays then began civil proceedings to obtain an injunction against Browne to silence him from disclosing what he knew about the secret 16-digit keys and codes that control the card security system.

It also successfully pressured the crown prosecution service (CPS) into the rare step of having two magistrate court hearings in camera so that none of the evidence could be heard in public. The CPS had initially opposed this demand. The CPS also ensured that Barclays was not identified as the target of the alleged blackmail – again a highly unusual privilege for companies subject to extortion.

Browne entered into a settlement with his former employer in December last year. From that point on Barclays appeared to some close to the case to lose enthusiasm for a prosecution which would publicise Browne's claims about their "sloppy" security. Barclays had been seriously embarrassed by two earlier incidents in which customer internet account information had leaked during last year.

Sources with knowledge of the prosecution suggested – no doubt incorrectly – that the bank had used the prosecution to ensure a settlement gagging Browne and once that was achieved was prepared to let the matter drop if the trial could not be done quickly and with minimum publicity. CPS officials complained at times about Barclays' attitude and cooperation. At one stage the then attorney-general Lord Williams is said to have been consulted.

The CPS, while insisting the case must go ahead, endeavoured to keep Barclays onside. It insisted on Browne's committal being in secret. It kept Barclays' name out of the indictment until the trial began and the bank had given up the fight for anonymity. It allowed Barclays to effectively hijack the original trial hearing in September by appearing with counsel and demanding that the bank's experts must check the blackmail letters and Browne's interviews with the police to remove any "sensitive information" about the keys and codes.

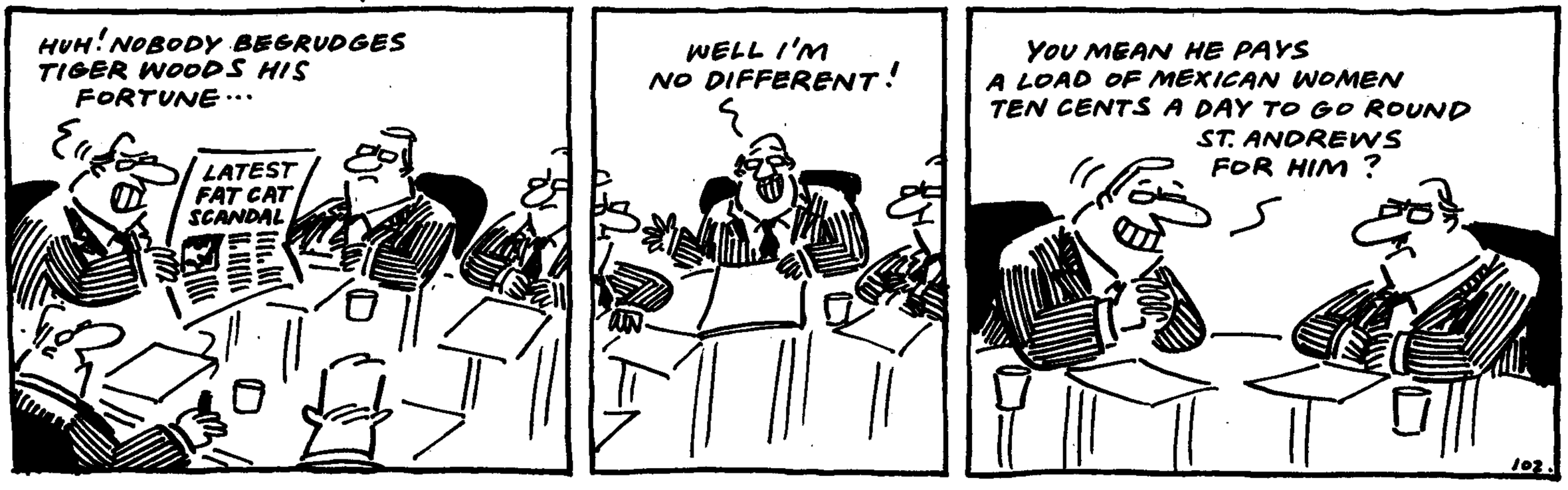
This last intervention resulted in the trial being delayed two months. The bank's fears could always have been handled by replacing or redacting real keys and codes – as was done for the trial. Even at the seven-day trial Barclays was still represented by a gaggle of barristers and lawyers.

Barclays shareholders might wonder at the justification for the large legal bill the bank has run up dealing with Graham Browne and endeavouring to keep the background to his case secret. Barclaycard holders might also wonder about the truth of Browne's statement to the police that the bank management "don't care about security".

ONE of "new" Labour's most loyal big business supporters is in big trouble. Major US energy group Enron is having to seek a rescue bid from smaller Texas rival Dynegy after revealing last month a $2bn-plus reduction in shareholder equity and write-off against assets followed by a savage rewriting down of profits

THE DIRECTORS

DREDGE/RIGG


HUH! NOBODY BEGRUDGES TIGER WOODS HIS FORTUNE…
LATEST FAT CAT SCANDAL
WELL I'M NO DIFFERENT!
YOU MEAN HE PAYS A LOAD OF MEXICAN WOMEN TEN CENTS A DAY TO GO ROUND ST. ANDREWS FOR HIM?
102.

Stock Horror

BT's WRONG NUMBERS

This year's profits and losses for...

...Outgoing Chief Executive Sir Peter Bonfield

[redacted]

...Shareholders

[redacted]

since 1997. The shares have fallen almost 90 percent this year.

The cause of Enron's downfall is multi-billion undisclosed off-balance sheet transactions used to artificially inflate profits and the share price. These involved incestuous transactions with partnerships run by Enron executives who profited mightily. Several senior suits have now left the Enron executive suite and the Securities & Exchange Commission watchdog is hot on the Enron trail.

Enron has always been a political corporation as befits a business based on public utilities – electricity, gas and water. It has close ties to President "Dubya" Bush and gave generously to the Republican cause in last year's US election. Enron was the biggest donor to Bush.

In Britain, where it acquired Wessex Water and gas-powered power stations, Enron equally avidly courted Labour pals and influence. In 1997 Enron paid £7,500 for a table at the Labour party gala dinner. It did the same in 1998 but then also paid £15,000 to sponsor two tables at the 1998 Labour conference and a reception beforehand. Another £5,000 table was sponsored at the 1999 gala.

Enron received value for money. Its Wessex Water takeover was cleared and it was allowed to build two new gas-powered power stations, despite a supposed moratorium since ended. And in the last new year's honours Enron Europe chairman Ralph Hodge received a CBE.

But the still unravelling Enron scandal in the US could mean the end for "Dubya" benefactor Kenneth Lay, the Enron chairman. It also puts egg all over the face of "President" Blair for cosying up to a company with so much to hide. Not of course that Labour had not been warned. Enron had been targeted by Amnesty International and branded by Multinational Monitor as one of "the world's ten worst corporations".

But then Blair and "new" Labour never meets a businessman it does not like – especially when they give money.

'Slicker'

Number crunching

£200,000

■ Amount that BP will pay former Downing Street adviser Anji Hunter for help with "communications".

£200,000

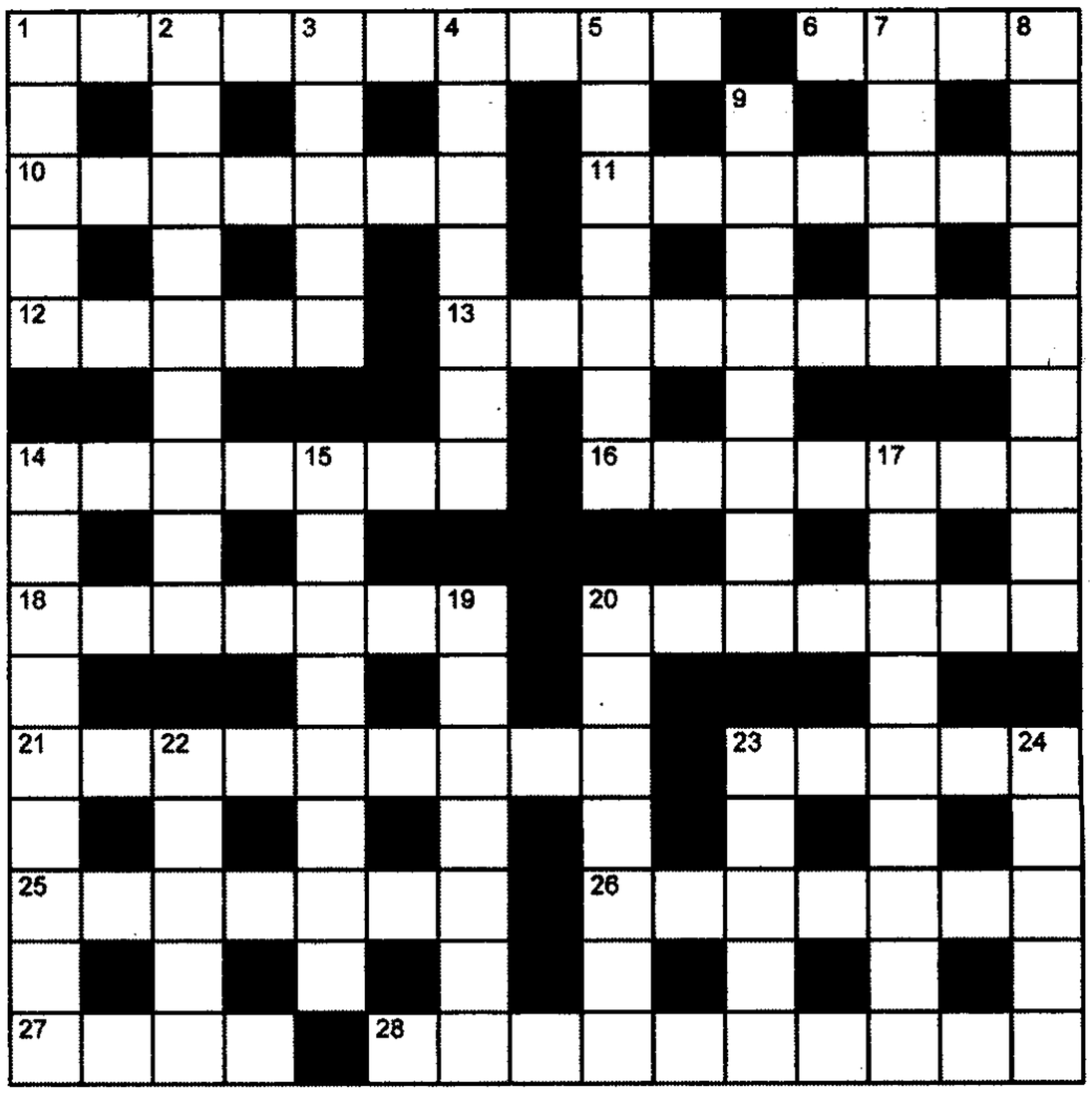
■ Amount that BP is authorised by shareholders to give in political donations each year.

EYE CROSSWORD 196

by Cyclops

£100 prize to first correct solution opened on 23 November 2001.

Entries to 'Crossword', Private Eye, 6 Carlisle Street, London W1D 3BN or via email to crossword@private-eye.co.uk



ACROSS

1/9 "Motivational action" is a blow to arsehole (1,4,2,3,8)
6 Roger's bird (4)
10 The old lady grabs a small heap of appearance-enhancer (7)
11 Present holder is Marlon 'No-act Fatso' (4,3)
12 Successful strippers get flipping browny points (5)
13 Produce a limp member after opening one (5,1,3)
14 Brenda to Brian – joke with yen for a grand title (7)
16 Provocations making one lust, stifling back musical note (7)
18 Too much of a coward for illegal deliveries? (2,5)
20 Reportedly try to escape the sack, being a lousy type (7)
21 Not queer but provoking a gay response (5,2-2)
23 Not really a star, this topless woman getting tabloid backing (5)
25 In the royal habit of, um, getting in with Ian Hislop? (7)
26 Love-making that doesn't go as far as giving head (7)
27 It's dandy when bust comes to a point (4)
28 Gay has bonk – not a good standard to set on ship (5,5)

DOWN

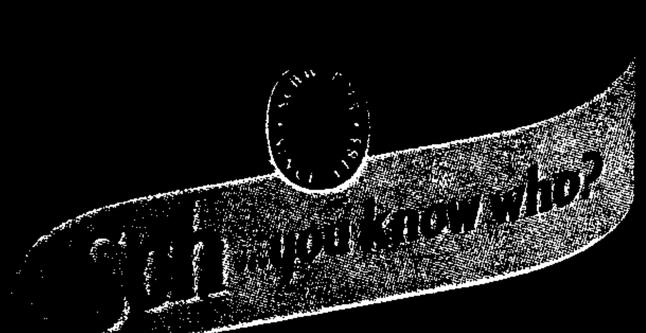
1 Emasculated nutters, publicists! (5)
2 Prison librarian, perhaps and what he's doing time for (6,3)
3 Topless furniture store model's a linesman (5)
4 Rich pleasure-seeker Penny needs someone to screw up – lout! (7)
5 He's off to snatch piss, people (7)
7 Hilton's passionate letter (5)
8 To be unwanted, try asking for a handout (2,7)
9 See 1 Across
14 Mid-life crisis around North East – a dangerous environment (9)
15 Bob disporting and spreading legs, ...? (8)
17 ... stiff but not encouraging to anal sex (9)
19 Bastard who's not named (2-3-2)
20 Material that's a load of bollocks (7)
22 Duck when collared by damn foreign traveller (5)
23 Our Tony's against one mounting a banger (5)
24 Darling of tabloid (American) getting erection (5)

Crossword 195 winner IAN KELLETT

Solution to Crossword 195

ACROSS: 1 Bosoms 4 Spanking 10/13 Get ones knickers in a twist 11 Appendage 12 Extra 15 Smack 17 Rigid 19 Trash can 22 Award 24 Half-arsed 25 Bodily functions 26 Eye to eye 27 Wyvern.

DOWN: 1 Big Mac 2 Sit-upon 3 Man United 5 Ponce 6 Niche 7 Inertia 8 Gas masks 9 Essayist 14 Thailand 15 Schmaltzy 16 Preamble 18 Grandee 20 Asshole 21 Odds-on 23 Dildo 24 Huffy.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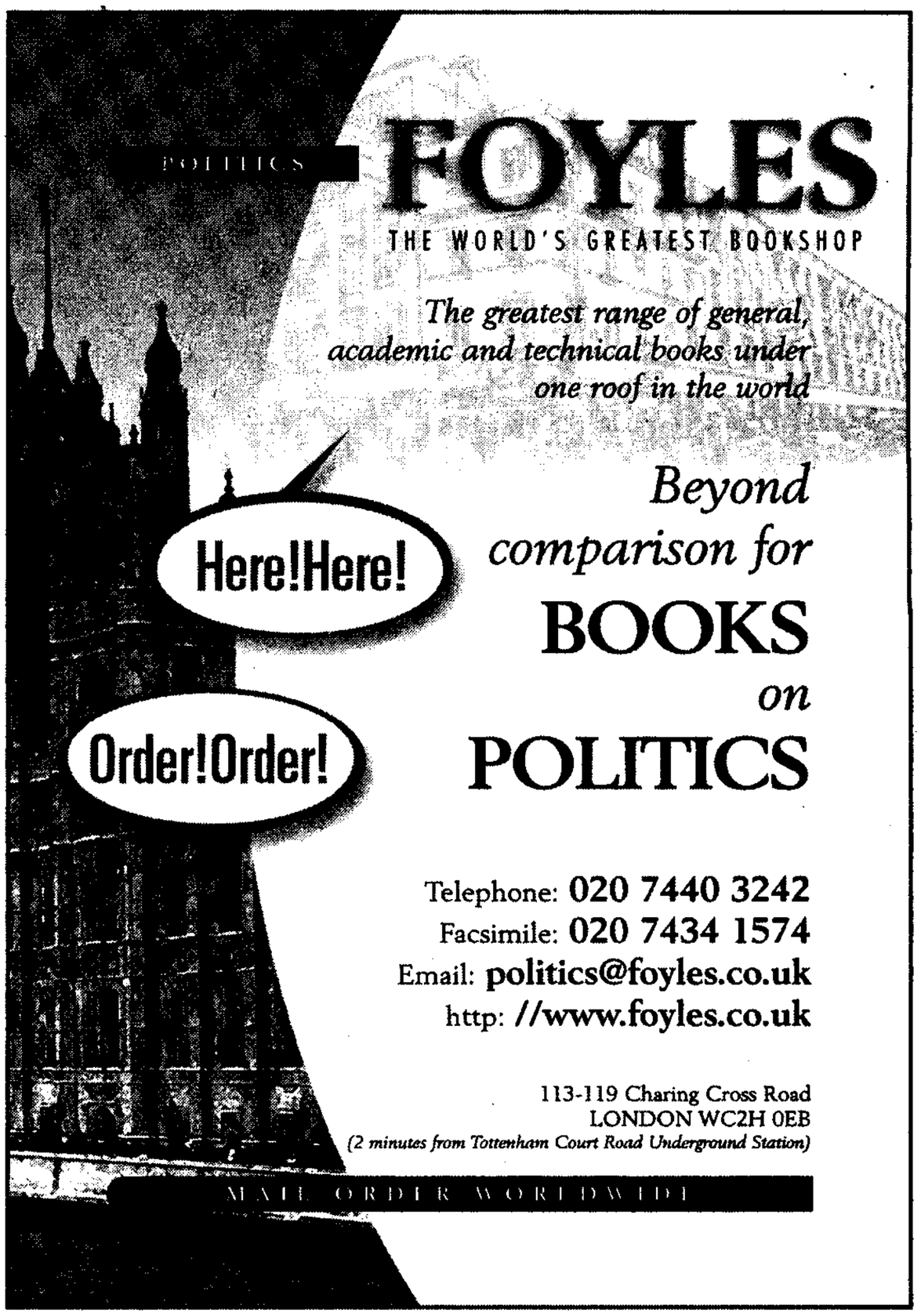

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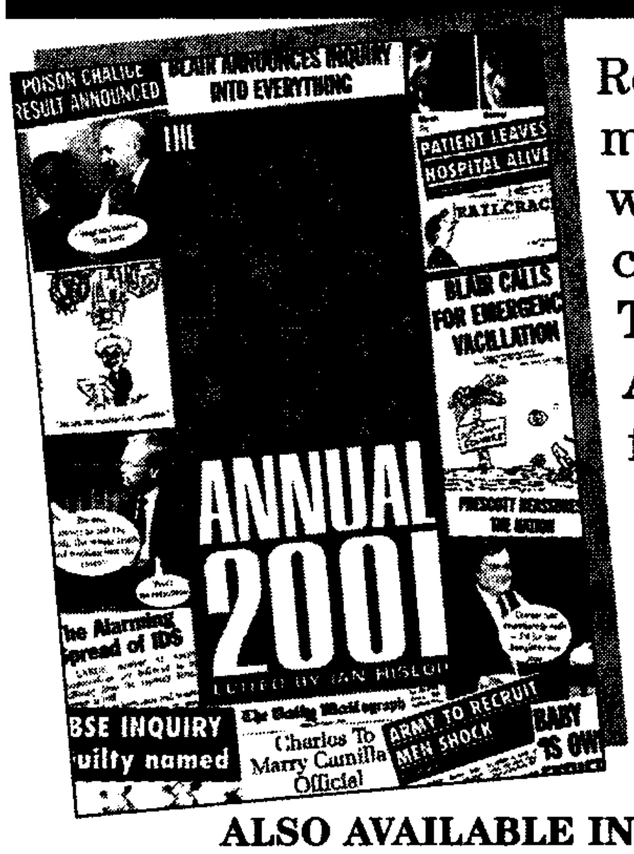

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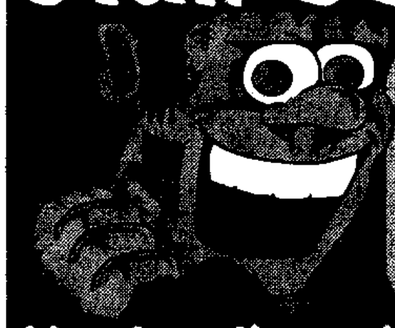

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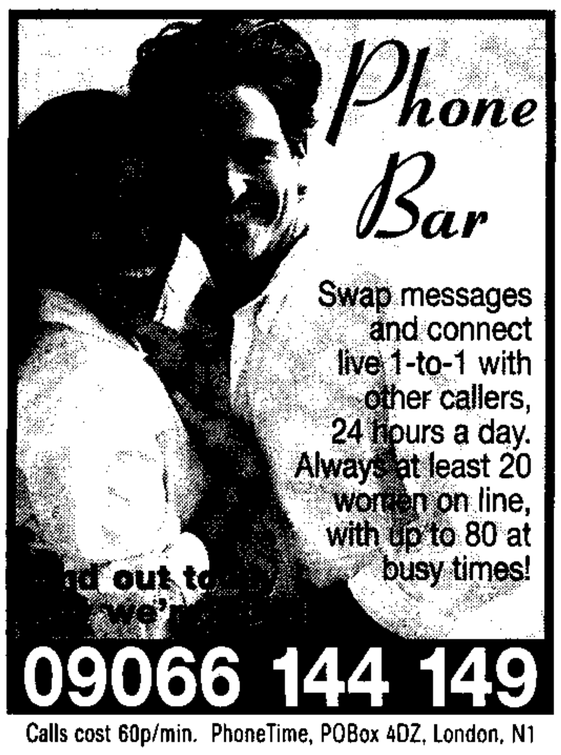
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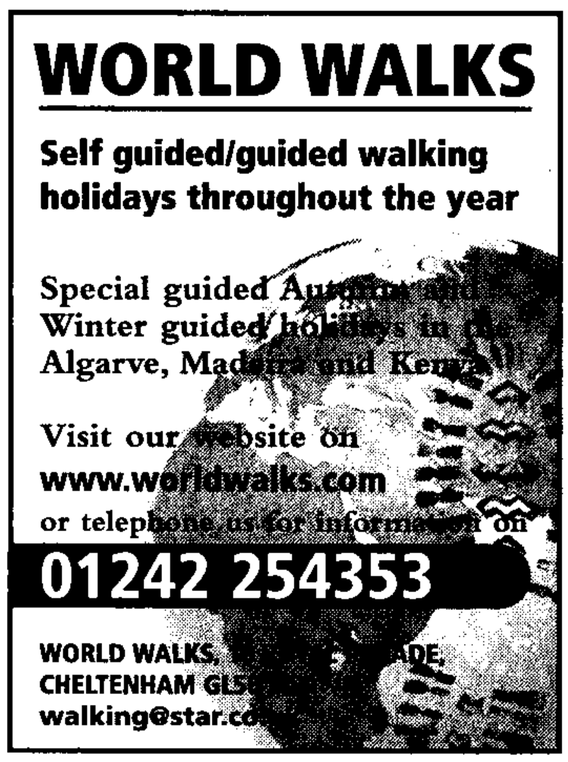
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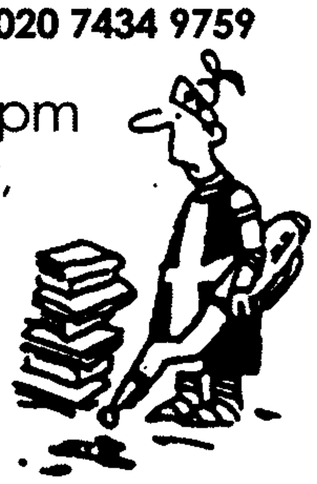

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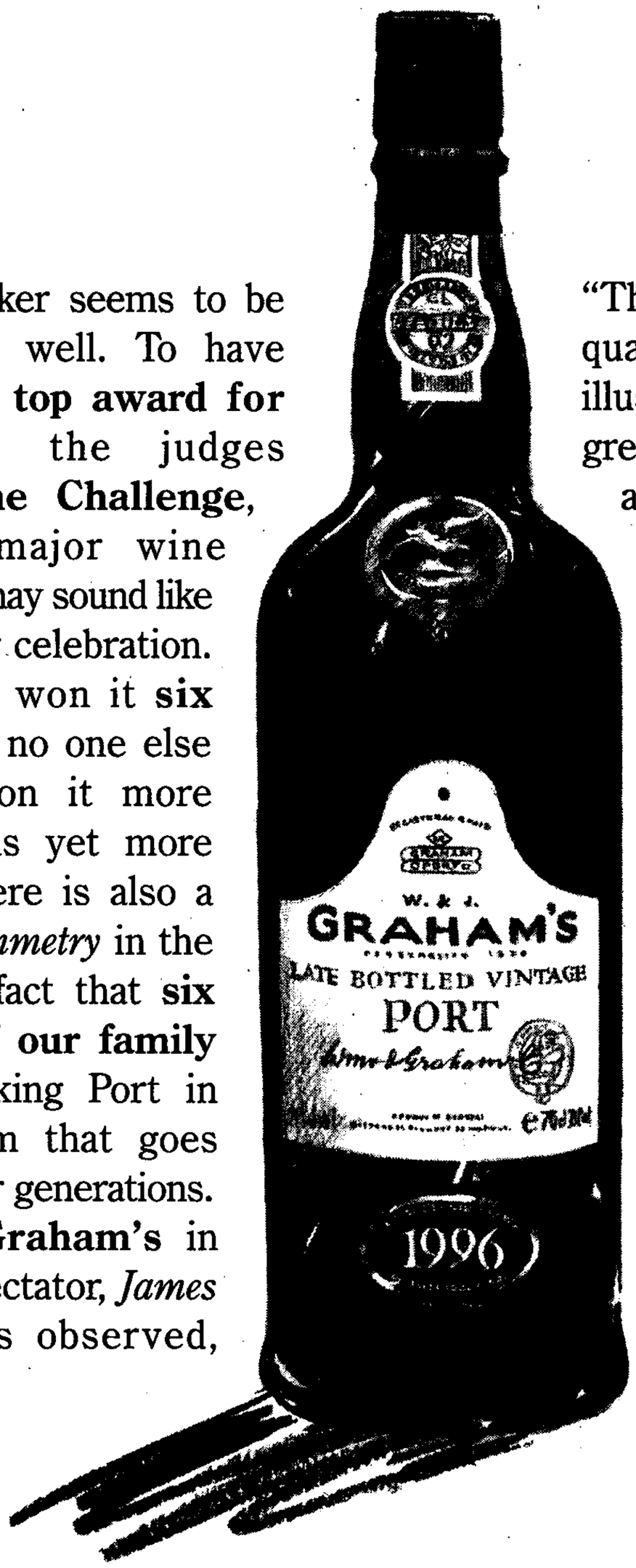

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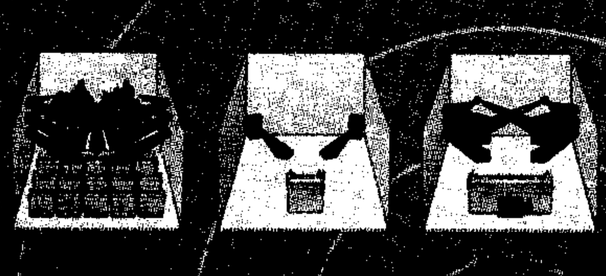

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